

Dump the baggage and get on the road two by two

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist, July 7th, 2024 - Mark 6:1-13 & 2 Cor 12:2-10)

Jesus was having a bad day, he'd come back to his hometown perhaps to share with them what he had been doing. Here he is with the people he grew up with, standing in the temple teaching. No doubt many had wondered what had happened to the young tradie they knew. How had he become such a good teacher, such an eloquent speaker. However, before long they don't take him seriously, they ridicule him and ultimately reject him. It is hard to talk to those you grew up with, they know you, warts and all, they know your needs, they know your faults. Sometimes they think they know you better than you know yourself. Whatever happened, they don't take him seriously, they don't get what he is on about. Or are they troubled by the challenge he is setting before them? Or is it easier to ridicule and reject him rather than engage with what he is saying. Is their response fueled by jealousy or have they let their preconceptions get in the way?

No doubt the experience was painful for Jesus. He could have let it get the better of him and get stressed, depressed or even angry, but he doesn't. He simply moves on and goes about the business of sharing the love of God with all. This experience doesn't slow him down.

He simply doesn't let it get him down. He doesn't let this experience become baggage that will slow him down as he goes about his mission. He will not let their negativity get him down. He shakes the dust off his shoes and moves on and gets on with his task.

As he goes, he takes his disciples with him and gives them the same task. They are to do what he has been doing – teaching, restoring people to wholeness, telling them about who God is and how they might relate to a loving God.

He gives them some instructions for the mission though.

First, don't go alone, go in pairs, that will represent the idea of community in a better way and provide another to encourage and help you on the journey.

Just take a stick, to help you as you walk through difficult terrain.

Take nothing more than you need, no extra stuff, no extra baggage – no prejudice, no predetermined outcomes, no sense that you aren't good enough or don't have the right training, or enough money or experience. After all God will provide for you, his grace says Paul is sufficient.

Accept the hospitality of others, eat what they eat, share their table, their food, their life. Trust in the hospitality of others. Eating the same food as others removes any separation, no one is excluded, all are on the same level, all are included. This means sharing in the life of others, an act of solidarity.

If you are rejected, that's okay just move on to where you are welcomed

And what is the purpose of all of this? To bring healing and wholeness to all, to share both the knowledge and experience of God's love with all. To participate in the mission of Jesus, to follow in his footsteps.

How do we apply this story to our own lives? What is it that holds you back from going about sharing the love of God with others? Do you feel you don't have the necessary training or abilities? Do you think you might be ridiculed or rejected by others? All of that might be true, but Jesus says don't let that hold you back, God's love for you will get you through. Dump that baggage and find a friend who will join you on the journey, God's grace is sufficient. Just give it a go.

What else stops you from going and giving and receiving the hospitality of others? Is it fear? Do you have preconceptions or prejudices about others that you need to rid yourself of? Are you scared of giving up some comfort and power? Jesus says you need to rid yourself of that extra baggage.

Find yourself a companion who will journey through the ups and downs with you, who will encourage you as you try to live out your faith, who will challenge you to live out your faith, to practice what you preach, who will pick you up when you fall down. Just start the journey putting one foot in front of the other as you share with your 'spiritual' companion.

What about the church, this church? What does this story have to say to us? What gets in the way of us as the church universal and local sharing God's love, of taking care of the sick, the homeless, the hungry? What stops us from including those who are so often excluded and on the margins of society? What do we need to let go of? What weighs us down, is it needing to care for buildings that are not used regularly? Is it propping up programs that no longer are effective, for example, do we really need a Sunday School when we have no children attending, is there a better way of sharing the faith with young people? Is it the past that stops us from doing things in a new more creative way? I am all for honouring the past, and learning from it, but it should never constrain us from sharing God's love in new ways. Sometimes we have to give up the old ways, give up control and create space for the Spirit to do a new thing.

So, let me encourage you to dump the extra baggage that weighs you down and gets in the way of sharing God's love. Get rid of past resentment, past control, past guilt and past rejection. Leave behind resistance and unfriendliness, let go and begin again.

Let's gather as a community, as friends who share a common task, as ones who are your fellow travellers, who are there to lean on, to share the load with, to pick you up when you get down.

Remember as Paul and St Ignatius remind us that God's love and God's grace is enough for us. Amen.