

Growing to be convinced of God's plan

Mark 8:27-38

55 years ago 5 young men walked into the recording studios of Decca Records,
and presenting themselves they played 15 of their songs
with the hope of convincing Decca's executives to sign them up.
It was all to no avail, with Decca responding to one of the young men,
the band's manager, Brian Epstein, that
"Guitar Groups are on the way out, Mr Epstein."

Decca had a couple of different groups auditioning at the time,
And they decided to sign up one group called *Brian Poole and the Tremeloes*.
I have to confess that I had never heard of that group until hearing this story,
but I have heard of the other young men who got rejected
(the four men who were being managed by Mr Epstein),
their names were John, Paul, George and Ringo,
and three months later they would be signed by EMI as *The Beatles*.

It's one of these great stories that you hear from time to time
about great ideas and plans and opportunities that foolishly get rejected.

When JK Rowling was trying to find a publisher for the first *Harry Potter* novel,
she was rejected by 12 separate publishers,
and when Bloomsbury decided to sign on they told JK Rowling
that she'd better find another job because
"there isn't a lot of money in Children's literature"
They weren't convinced that a story about a boy wizard was going places.

And a third example:
about 2000 years ago a Rabbi named Jesus told his friends
that God's plan was to offer salvation to the world
through his own death and resurrection
Upon hearing this plan, one of his closest friends pulled him aside
and told him to stop speaking nonsense.

Today is the second installment in a sermon series called "Growing more like Jesus",
a series looking to reconnect us with our mission here at Waitara Anglican.
Our goal as a community is to help everyone discover Christ
and *grow more and more like him*.

And so in this series we are asking the question:
What was Jesus like? What is this shape that we want to grow into?
And today we see that—when others doubted—
Jesus was *utterly convinced* of the plan that God was enacting in the world.
Growing more like Jesus means being convinced of God's crazy sounding plan.

Our passage today is taken from the middle of Mark's Gospel (starting at 8:27)
at a point when the reality of God's plan is revealed to the disciples,
a plan that is both *Christ-centred* and *cross-shaped*.

Up until this moment in Mark's Gospel Jesus has been doing
all sorts of things that have sent tongues wagging.
Sometimes it was because of the absolute confidence with which he preached.
"We haven't heard someone teach like this before" people would say.
Other times it was because of the miraculous works he was able to perform.
And so the question everyone is asking is "Who is this man?"

And in a moment of quiet, as they are travelling between villages,
Jesus asks his closest friends in verse 27:
"What answers are people coming up with?
Who do people say I am?"
And so the disciples relate what it is they have heard:
"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

It's understandable why people might be giving these answers.
Up until John the Baptist, Israel had not heard a prophetic voice in 400 years.
But here comes Jesus hot on the heels of John the Baptist
with a message unlike anything else going around.

And the miracles that he could perform were similar to those Elijah was capable of,
and so people thought it was John or Elijah
or maybe one of the other ancient prophets who'd come back to life.

And in a sense, these people were right; Jesus *was* a prophet.
But could it be the case that he was much more than that?
The disciples seem to think so, v 29 "But what about you?" [Jesus] asked.
"Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

The Messiah is one of these technical terms that you might hear in church,
It simply means "God's anointed one".
In the OT, individuals were sometimes anointed with oil
in a ceremony that set them apart for a particular task among God's people.
And as the OT progressed it became clear
that one day there would come a messiah with a capital M;
The Messiah who, unlike the others,
would defeat the enemies of God's people once and for all.

The disciples have come to the correct view that Jesus of Nazareth is that Messiah;
that God's big plan for the world,
that his big plan to rescue his people,
is a plan that centers on the actions of this one individual –
a carpenter's Son from a tiny town in the ancient middle east.

Now for those of us who have been Christians for a while this is not news,
But just think for a moment how radical this is for people of different faiths.

It seems to me that every religion understands that humanity needs saving,
and so the systems that they come up all try and present a path of somekind.
Buddhists speak about finding enlightenment
by working out how to rid yourself of desire.
Hindu's speak of striving to achieve dharma
in order to be free of the cycle of life and death.
Muslims believe that if you submit to Allah – particularly with the five pillars
then you might convince him to have mercy on you.
Now what's the common thread throughout all of these options?
They all involve each one of us
taking on the mighty task of securing this salvation ourselves.

By contrast, the plan articulated by Peter in Mark 8 involves the work of one man;
A Messiah sent by God to achieve salvation on behalf of others.

This is really hard for people to accept.
I can recall conversations I've had with Hindus
where they cannot comprehend that there is only one path provided one man.
Incomprehensible that there be only one solution to the plight of humanity.

For Muslims, it is incomprehensible that salvation comes by the grace of God alone. And they're not the only ones who have trouble with this concept. I remember a white Australian friend of mine saying that he was offended that someone would die on his behalf. This is something I've heard a number of times: for many of my white brethren the idea of Christ securing salvation on our behalf really does challenge our sense of pride. Either we hate the idea that there's something wrong with in the first place or we hate the suggestion that we can't do anything to fix it ourselves.

*"If I'm a good enough catholic", I've heard another one white, anglo-celtic man say,
"then God will surely let me into heaven."*

But the truth is so much more glorious than that.
The wonderful thing about God's plan isn't that he is open to being impressed,
It's that he has gone to great lengths to secure that salvation for us himself.
Heaven is not dependent upon our own efforts,
But rather on the effort of one person, God's Messiah, Jesus Christ.

It sounds crazy, but this is the plan that Jesus and his disciples were convinced by.
Or at least, the disciples were convinced of it as far as they understood it.
In the next section of our passage,
Peter shows that he's hasn't completely understood Christ's Messiahship.

In verse 31, Jesus explains that not only is God's plan centered on him,
but it is also *cross-shaped*:

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Yes he is the Messiah, but the path by which he would save his people
would be an unexpected one, involving suffering, rejection and murder.
Now as Jesus is explaining this, Peter can't believe what he is hearing,
v 32 He spoke plainly about this,
and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.
"What are you talking about Jesus? This is not the plan I have in mind!"

What Peter probably had in mind was the image of Jesus taking up arms,
establishing an earthly Kingdom where the Romans would be kicked out.
But as Jesus would explain elsewhere, "My kingdom is not of this earth",
rather the enemies he came to fight
were the enemies of death and of our sins which lead to death.
The salvation Jesus was securing
was on an entirely different plane to what Peter had imagined.

But gosh it must have been tempting for Jesus to set up rule here on earth.
If his miracles were anything to go by, he had the power to do just that,
and if you remember from Matthew's Gospel,
the Devil attempted to derail Jesus by issuing that very lure in front of him.

And it seems that with Peter's rebuke Jesus started to feel the same temptation
But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!"
he said.
Jesus can hear in Peter the same temptation being issued to grab power.
"Come on Jesus, giving in to those who want to kill you? Just wipe them out."
Show them who really is boss. Set yourself up to rule properly"

But Jesus is convinced that it's God's plan that must win the day.
"You do not have in mind the concerns of God, he informs Peter
but merely human concerns."
It's God's plan to deal with human sin by Christ's death and resurrection.
And it's this plan, as painful as it might be, that must win out in the end,
It's God's plan—and not any human plan—that must take precedence.

Like Peter,
we can do a pretty good job
at molding Christianity into a vehicle to suit our own agendas.

In the news this week, the ABC highlighted the terrible violence
that some women experience at the hands of Christian men.
It's to our great shame that churches have not been fully aware

of how some churchgoers can twist God's word
 in an attempt to justify violent and intimidating behavior.
 It's a case of a wicked human agenda
 overriding the wonderful plan of God,
 a plan which sees husbands and wives serving one another
 and not abusing one another.
 In particular it's the men who are asked to imitate Christ
 by embracing a life of self-sacrifice for the sake of their wives.
 And we shouldn't be surprised at this,
 because as Jesus himself said, no servant is greater than their master,
 if we are claiming to follow Jesus, then we'll live as he did, won't we?

This is what Jesus goes on to explain in verses 34 to 38.

If it was a shock for Peter to hear God's plan about a Messiah crucified,
 then I'd hate to see the look on his face as Jesus continues with these words:
 "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves
 and take up their cross and follow me."
 The plan involves not only Jesus dying on our behalf,
 but each of his followers dying to themselves
 and throwing everything in with Christ,
 even if it means suffering alongside him.

I don't know if you've heard of the Mars-one consortium,
 it's a group that's planning to send a colony of humans to Mars,
 They're already in the process of attracting candidates for the mission:
 Adventurous people who are happy to make this one-way journey
 – the plan is that once they arrive they're not coming back.
 I think it sounds like a ridiculous plan,
 there's no way I'd sign up to move planets!

But then I had an email from my sister, (she's not planning on moving to mars)
 But she is conducting some research into our family's history,
 and it turns out that our great-great grandmother did something very similar.

Jane Carberry was her name and she was born Ireland
 where her family was decimated by the potato famine of the 1840s
 Her parents died, her sister died,
 but Jane was offered a chance of salvation
 in the form of the Earl Grey scheme.
 Earl Grey was the British colonial secretary
 who arranged for about 4000 of these Irish orphan girls
 to come to Australia to boost our population.
 And so in 1848 Jane Carberry hopped on a boat
 never to return to her native Ireland again
 In 1849 she landed here in Sydney,
 and in 1850 she married Henry Kemp and then had 14 children.

I'm glad she didn't stop much earlier because my great grandfather was number 12!

But think about her story for just a moment.

She was totally destitute and in need of a type of salvation,
a salvation she had no chance of generating herself,
and when it arrived in the form of Earl Grey's plan, it necessitated
the giving up of one life and the complete embracing of another.
There was no way she could have one foot in Ireland and the other in NSW.

And so it is with the plan that God invites us to be part of;
accepting Christ as the Messiah is an all or nothing affair.

Verses 35-36 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life
for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world,
yet forfeit their soul?

Imagine if young Jane said "No thanks, I'd rather keep my life here in Ireland."
She would have died. But in loosing her Irish life she saved her Australian life.

There are plenty of people who accept Christ with joy,
but then they want to hang on their old life,
the life where *they* made the rules, where *they* acted as they pleased,
and we especially feel this when we start to suffer because of this new life.

Jesus indicates in v 38

that one difficulty will be the shame and scorn
that the world piles on those who've placed their faith in Christ.
We may wish for the good old days before faith when we fitted in!
But as Messiah, Jesus is both savior and King;
he saved us to live for him and not for our own comfort.
Friends, Not only do we need to be convinced that Jesus is the Messaih,
but we need to *remain convinced* that the plan is worth sticking with.

I'm not sure whether you've seen this before,

This in an ancient piece of graffiti that was found in Rome,
it's the oldest pictorial representation of Christ's crucifixion that we have.
There's a man worshipping a figure on a cross,
and that figure has the body of a man but the head of a horse.
And the inscription below reads *Alexamenos worships his God*
Alexamenos believed in *plan Jesus*:
he was convinced that Jesus was the messiah,
and obviously his ongoing belief in that plan
was tested as he echoed Christ by enduring the scorn of others.
I hope he remain convinced,
because if he did he's enjoying eternal life even as we speak.

Are you convinced? I hope so! Let's pray.