

Sermon Given by

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At the Morning Service on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2010

### Mark 3:7-18 - "One nation under God"

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We've noticed in recent weeks as we looked at Jesus in debate with his enemies there is the sense of a gathering storm - because all the incidents are conflict stories and with each story the conflict intensifies.

Holman Hunt, one of the Pre-Raphaelites painted a picture of Jesus inside the carpenter's shop in Nazareth,

Jesus is stripped to the waist, standing by a wooden trestle on which he's put down his saw. He lifts both eyes to heaven and the look on his face is hard to read... Agony? Ecstasy? Maybe it's both? Jesus is stretching his arms at the end of a long day. As he does so the evening sunlight streaming thru the windows casts a shadow in the form of a cross onto the wall. The tool rack forms a cross-beam. And the tools are there as a reminder of the fateful hammer and nails. Hunt called his painting the Shadow of Death. It's an imagined scene, but it's theologically accurate in that the cross did cast its shadow over all of Jesus life even from birth.

Certainly when we get to the final verse of our passage last week (3:6) there's an air of inevitability about Jesus death:

***6Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.***

How is Jesus going to deal with this watershed moment? Is his movement going to be snuffed out, before it's even begun?

I've got a little formula to help us with today's section: Rejection by the Leaders plus Enthusiasm from Crowds leads to Appointment of apostles and the formation of a new people of God.

**Rejection by the leaders** is obvious enough in chapter 3 verse 6; what's less obvious is how starkly it's put: for the Pharisees and the Herodians to end up as bedfellows, partners in crime, plotting together is extraordinary.

The Pharisees we know quite well. They're hostile to Jesus because he denies their righteousness before God. Remember how they saw Sabbath-keeping as they did all their law-keeping, as man's gift to God. Doing something for God. And Jesus had to say 'no, it's the other way round: the Sabbath is God's gift to you. God set it up for man out of his great mercy, because we need a break'.

We never put God in our debt by doing things for him. That lesson was a huge dent to their **self-righteousness**. They wouldn't give up their pride.

With the Herodians it was different. We haven't seen anything of them yet, but it emerges later why they were opposed to the growing movement: Herod was their leader: he'd had John the Baptist put in prison back in Chapter 1:14. The reason was because John told him he should not marry his brother's wife. He'd heard John's preaching and been amazed, but he would not stop his adulterous relationship and so the voice of God had to be silenced. He wouldn't give up his sin.

So these two groups are from the opposite end of the spectrum: the Pharisees were the guardians of morality, they couldn't hack Jesus. The Herodians were a byword for **Immorality** and they can't hack God's revelation through John and then Jesus. Together, the leadership of Israel rejected Jesus, refusing to recognise who he is: their true king.

On to second element of our formula: Rejection by Leaders + **Enthusiasm from crowds** - leads to appointment of apostles + formation of a new people.

verse 7: ***Jesus withdrew with his disciples and a large crowd from Galilee followed.*** (So the crowds are still coming; they don't share their leaders' verdict.) ***When they heard all that he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.***

If we look at a map we can see that Mark's list covers all points of the compass: Tyre and Sidon West and North, Across the Jordan in the East and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea in the South. Idumea is off the map 100+ miles away. A long way if they did that on foot.

We're meant to be making a little comparison with the distance they travelled to hear John the Baptist in Chapter 1. That time people came from the whole Judean Countryside and Jerusalem. Mark's making a little point about Jesus being greater than John. Jesus has greater pulling power than the Baptist... A rock's been thrown into the pond and the ripples are expanding outwards. The shockwaves of what God is doing are spreading out, spreading out, spreading out: wider and wider in concentric circles.

As before the crowds put real pressure on Jesus in verses 9-12 I love the Good News Bible's Picture. It's a lovely tranquil pastoral scene. Jesus sitting calmly in the boat: the crowd is about a hundred strong and very orderly. A few sheep in the background, someone's walking the dog in the foreground. There are even one or two people topping up on their tan while they listen and a few kids playing leapfrog at the waters edge.

That's not quite how it sounds in Marks version:

***<sup>9</sup>Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. <sup>10</sup>For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. <sup>11</sup>Whenever the evil<sup>[a]</sup> spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." <sup>12</sup>But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was.***

It sounds to me like Jesus is desperate to keep his priority - preaching. So he goes for the boat option... and they're still in up to the ankles trying to get to him.

Huge pressure - and still there's the problem of the evil spirits testifying to who he is. As before, Jesus has to silence them because he doesn't want press releases from hell: maybe the devil's forces are telling the truth, but he's a lousy spin doctor. Already there are huge crowds and what's likely to happen if people latch on to Jesus identity as the Messiah without understanding why he's come.

You see we're back where we were in chapter one. Huge pressure on Jesus. So what is the future of this huge popular movement? Will the movement be crushed under its own weight? How is Jesus to respond?

The answer is that he responds exactly as he did before; he walks away from the crowds - out of circulation, up a mountain.

Here's the formula again. Rejection by the Leaders + Enthusiasm from the crowds leads to Appointment of Apostles and formation of a new people.

Which leads us on to the following verses, 13 onwards... ***Jesus went upon a mountainside and called to him those he wanted and they came to him.***

In this instance Mark is not recording a simple re-run of the magnetic effect that Jesus had on the crowds – we've seen how they were drawn to Jesus – in this case the initiative was with him: these were specific people he called to himself, for a reason.

***VERSE 14 He appointed 12, designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the 12 he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means sons of Thunder; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.***

Notice the number. 12 - which fits in with what we've seen already. The leaders of the Old Israel have rejected Jesus; the people for the moment appear to have cast their vote with Jesus; and so now he must start again: a new Israel. And just as the old Israel had 12 tribes so his new people will have 12 leaders or apostles.

Which picks up the theme of fulfilment which we saw last week... If you were here you will remember that we were considering how the Old Testament Laws are not immediately to be carried straight over into the New Testament age as if they were laws directly for us.

In Romans 10:4 Paul describes Jesus as the end of the Law. He fulfils it and therefore there is a sense in which all the Old Law terminates with the coming of Jesus.

That can be seen very clearly with the ceremonial laws of the New Testament, which are not commanded in the New Testament.

However law as a category does continue. So Jesus in the New Testament plainly does call on his followers to submit to his authority – and there are moral standards which he calls his disciples to keep. They're not an external code like the 10 commandments written on stone, but internalised by the Holy Spirit - Paul calls it the 'Law of Christ' in 1 Corinthians 10.

As Lord he calls on us to submit to **his** authority, as the fulfilment of the law. So there are plainly moral standards which we are to submit to if Jesus is Lord.

Now not only is Jesus the fulfilment of the Law he's also the fulfilment of Israel. With Jesus we are seeing the end of the Old Israel and the start of a new people of God – the church.

Instead of the 12 tribes we now have a tiny new beginning, gathered around Jesus - 12 apostles. He's already called 5 and now another 7 are added. The number matters to Mark: The Twelve is his favourite name for the apostolic band... A new nation is gathering around Jesus and around his 12 apostles.

Obviously the names of the apostles mattered to him too.

Why else give us the full list.

The reason is clear when we see their significance... What did Jesus have in mind when he called them? Have a look at verse 14 and you'll see two specific things.

First ***that they might be with him***... and second ***that he might send them out to preach and to have authority***.

The first of those was absolutely vital - he could not send them out to proclaim and demonstrate his kingdom unless they'd first been with him and understood everything.

And it's something we'll see again and again from now on in Mark. There's a focus on the crowds, yes. But again and again Jesus concentrates on the disciples. So in chapter 4 - Jesus preaches the parable of the Sower then, v 10 ***When he was alone, the Twelve and the others round him asked him about the parables***. And they get some in depth private tuition... Wouldn't you love to have been in on that Bible Study???

Of course it's not just the teaching. The inner crowd of disciples got to **see** things Jesus did which no-one else saw. For example three of them got front row seats at the Transfiguration - and before their eyes Jesus was miraculously transformed in appearance. Spectacular! Wouldn't you love to have been there?

From Mark 8 onwards, virtually everything is done in private with the Twelve. They were the focus of most of his last year. Don't you just wish you were in on that: hearing that teaching, watching that life?

The answer of course is that **because they were there, you and I don't need to have been there**. We can hear what they heard through their ears. We can see what they saw through their eyes.

And that is why before they could be **sent** they had to **be with** him. Or what half-baked ideas would they pass on when they went!

Just a quick cross-reference. Turn, please, to p. 1093 Acts 1:21. The Apostles are meeting to discuss who can replace Judas: and here's the indispensable qualification for Apostolic Ministry: it must be, according to verse 21: ***one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us***.

Back to Mark 3. That's exactly what Jesus had in mind isn't it... ***That they might be with him***.

**Then** the second thing can happen: ***that he might send them out*** – literally, apostle them - ***to preach and to have authority to drive out demons***.

The very things Jesus has been doing. So what has happened? These people who have spent time with Jesus are then in a position where he can send them with the very same authority that he has. They're extensions of his ministry.

Now that is not something you can say of us today in quite the same way. Mark 3:14 is not a charter for us to preach and drive out demons. Because we haven't been with Jesus as they were and he hasn't 'apostled' us as he did them. This is about their unique authority as Jesus commissioned representatives.

They were with Jesus and they therefore go with Jesus authority. That means that they are the voice and authority of Jesus wherever they go.

There was a moment during the 1992 Rio Summit on Climate change when John Major the British pm met Li Peng - leader of the People's Republic of China.

It was just after Chris Patten had been appointed Governor of Hong Kong – and the relationship between Li Peng and Chris Patten was set to be a difficult one right up to the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

John Major wanted to make clear to Li Peng that he was 100% supportive of Chris Patten: So he told him 'This is one of my closest personal and political friends in Britain. He is one of the leading politicians in my party and in the country. And there's no point in thinking you can slip bits of tissue paper between him and no 10. If you are talking to him, you are talking to me.'

Those words proved very important to Chris Patten: 'The Chinese government failed to slip so much as a cigarette paper between me and John Major.

And you could say something similar about the relationship between Jesus and his apostles. it isn't possible to get even a cigarette paper between the apostles and Jesus – in the sense that he endorses them 100%. What they say, he says. Full stop. No discussion. We cannot ever set them in opposition to Jesus as if he has a different position to them on some issues.

Reassuringly, it means that even if I can't see Jesus direct or hear Jesus firsthand because I'm living in the wrong place at the wrong time, all I need to do is to go to is the apostles. And there's nothing that separates them from Jesus. I have direct access to Jesus through them.

That's why the names matter so much to Mark: he's telling us that to make sure that the people we listen to for info about Jesus are really qualified. Are they on this list?

'Objection, your Honour! I can't find Mark's name on the list?' 'Sustained.' Mark's name isn't there: but there is ample evidence in the Bible and in other early Christian writing that Mark has given us Peter's eyewitness apostolic account. Which means that as we read his account together we are as privileged as those who witnessed the teaching and miracles first-hand.

Time for us to begin to draw to a close, with a refresher on the little formula I offered to help us unlock today's passage Rejection of Jesus + enthusiasm of crowds leads to appointment of apostles and the formation of a new people of God.

It is this last point which I think gives us the practical challenge from the passage. In Jesus' plan, the apostles are going to be the means of the formation of a new people of God. In the context of opposition, it is Jesus word passed on through the apostles which will bring a new Israel into being.

The opposition is every bit as much part of our contemporary scene today. So we very much need to believe our beliefs that it is through the Bible message – and particularly the apostolic message - that God's people will be brought into being and built up.

It's no surprise that where the Bible is neglected, the forces that oppose Jesus are largely unchallenged and Gods' people are not growing. But where Jesus is teaching through his apostles, there we do see growth.

One of the prayer diaries I use lists each day for prayer a different diocese of the Anglican Communion. They just advance alphabetically through a list of all the dioceses dotting all around the

world; but I noticed recently that for a period of more than two weeks, one diocese after another has been in the Church of Nigeria.

Now at one level it is just that they have a lot of place names in Nigeria that begin with the letter I and that is where we had got to in the alphabetical list of Dioceses! But the fact is that there are 25 million Anglicans in Nigeria and they have had such phenomenal growth recently that they have created 20 new dioceses in the last four years.

Let me tell you their mission statement "The Church of Nigeria shall be Bible-based, spiritually dynamic, united, disciplined, self-supporting, committed to pragmatic evangelism, social welfare and a Church that epitomizes the genuine love of Christ." Perhaps that explains why God is growing his people in that part of the world.

It also gives us the clue to how we can see growth in God's people in the Western church – and how we can see growth in our church. The enemies of Christ both inside and outside the visible church have been busy. The answer will be to continue to stand on the Word of God, Old and New Testament.

I say to myself that of all the calls on my time, what I do to make my Sunday sermon the best and most Biblical effort I can is the most significant thing I can contribute to the life of the church.

It applies to the weekend away we are planning in March... There are any number of subsidiary aims we might have; but the most significant thing which is going to happen there in the life of the church will be the Bible teaching. That's why we are having a weekend away, primarily.

It applies in our families, if we have one. They are the top priority congregation we have: are we gathering in our families around the Bible. For us at the moment those times are always pretty chaotic, but we need to believe that that activity is creating the people of God.

Ditto the home groups as we re-arrange them – their value will be supremely because they enable us to gather as Christ's people around his word.

And as we embark on our October outreach, with some very encouraging, innovative ways to reach out, let's be sure to remember that it is through the Word of God that the People of God grows.

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Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.

(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)