

6 He (Jesus) left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offence at him. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, **“Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”** ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, **“Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.”** ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Dear friends in Christ...

Last week, we had some interesting discussion at our Coopers Plains ladies fellowship. The Bible Study touched on the ‘fear of sharing our Christian faith’ with people we know. We quickly left the Bible Study notes and spent most of our time working through the interpersonal problems that exist, in wanting to share a suitable Christian message with our neighbour.

From our small numbers, everyone had some good input. And there were some very common fears & reflections on sharing the gospel faith. As we spoke, everyone seemed to have friends or companions whom they wished ‘had more peace with God’.

I imagine that you all know someone at work or Uni, or at school, or in your social circles – someone whom you really wish would trust in God, the way that you do. You’ve got peace in your life; you know God; you talk to God in good times & bad. And you might now be thinking of a companion who doesn’t have all this. They may well know that you attend

church. You hear them speaking about their tough times, or you see a mess in their life - and all that you want, is to see them find peace with God. It's not much fun for Christians to watch their friends go through life without the knowledge & hope & peace of God.

You too, have your own troubles, and you are so grateful that you have the Lord to pray to. And most of all, you know that you have eternal life ready & waiting, once this present life is all done. And you want to see this very same hope of eternal life for your neighbour.

Many of you feel that your companions roughly believe that there is some 'greater power' out there. If you spend time with people alone (away from their peer pressures), people may then admit that they believe in some divine power that is much greater than humans.

Getting to this point is not too hard. The problem is, "Where to from here"? And this is where genuine concerns & fears come to the surface.

Perhaps you freeze up, because you know that spirituality is a sensitive topic. You don't want to upset people, you don't want to 'mess it up'. You genuinely want that person to know about God who cares, but you ask yourself, "What words do I use? Will I say the wrong thing? Will they start to avoid me - will they dishonour me? Fear of the sharing the faith is often a fear of the unknown response.

And it's no good, saying "I wish a pastor was here". Because if your companions are interested in God, they don't want to hear a pastor, they want to hear you - especially if they know you believe in God.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus was surprised by the response of the people in Nazareth. Nazareth was Jesus' hometown - Mary & Joseph came from Nazareth. Admittedly, Nazareth wasn't exactly a town known for great things (Jn1:46). And Jesus was surprised by the lack of interest in his message about the kingdom of God, and the lack of interest in his ability to heal & cure people. Jesus was all-knowing, yet he was still surprised by their unbelief.

Mark tells us that Jesus couldn't do much there in the way of miracles. All he could do was to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. We're not sure how long Jesus was there in Nazareth; but according to Mark, it just wasn't a great week for Jesus. Fancy that - only curing a handful of people over a few days!?! When we read this, we get an idea

of just how prolific the miracles must have been everywhere else that Jesus went.

The response of faith in Nazareth wasn't great. People were amazed by Jesus' wisdom, yet many didn't want to take it on board. They took offense that Jesus would come to his hometown to teach them in the synagogue. But to this negative response, Jesus said, *"Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."*

A month ago, in our Bible readings, Mark's gospel told us how Jesus' very own family thought he was going out of his mind, and they wanted to restrain him. His hometown people weren't exactly his fans. And Jesus felt the dishonour.

Now this may sound like a good reason to be wary about sharing your faith with your companions. You don't want to feel dishonoured. But what I wish to say today, is that scriptures like this were never meant to discourage you from giving some 'hope from God' to your companions.

Jesus was essentially identifying with the former prophets of Israel. He wasn't giving us a scripture verse to say that we can't give hope to our family, our companions & neighbours here today. Quite the contrary, even though Mark tells us that Jesus couldn't do much at Nazareth in the way of miracles, this didn't stop Jesus from trying. And Jesus did achieve some good – he cured a few people even in a town of exceptional negativity.

Clearly, this is not Nazareth, and we don't have the same context as Jesus did. Jesus has since blessed us with his crucifixion & resurrection work & message. Jesus has since blessed us with baptism. Jesus has since blessed us with holy communion. We each have people around us in our own unique context - people whom we talk to, listen to, & whom we pray for. You may not be a prophet, but even just a few helpful gospel/Christian words, may be received as a prophetic message - about a God who freely gives the hope of eternal life.

Remember that we are disciples of Jesus. This means we are always open to being trained for God's work. If you have someone whom you are currently praying for, someone with whom you are itching to share the hope of God – then why not touch-type, text on your phone, or write down (with a real pen & paper) a couple of things that you have been wanting to say to an unchurched friend. Maybe write it down in different ways and

see what might work best for the person you are trying to bless with God's love. Or talk it out with fellow Christians. Then it will be fresh on your mind when the next opportunity comes.

Every disciple is a bit different. Some Christians are very bold or confident in talking about their faith with their neighbour. Others are shy & reserved. It is not uncommon for Christians to be quietly longing to see one of their companions find peace with God. Jesus is that peace.

What is the name of someone, whom you really wish would trust in God, the way that you do? No-one can say if they will *honour* your words or *dishonour* your words. But the hope of eternal life is there to spur us on - to make a difference to these companions. Amen.