

**Sermon 4<sup>th</sup> July by Caroline Seaton. Based on 2 Samuel Ch 5 v1-5 9-10; Mark Ch 6 v 1-13.**

***Who do you think you are!***

Over the last few weeks our readings have been from the book of Samuel and the Gospel of Mark, building a picture of the supremacy of leadership in the Bible and the problems this instigated amongst the people then, and for many, still today.

Today our readings are of a similar vein – the role of a familiar face from within the people’s midst, which both David and Jesus were, emerging as prominent leaders, and the people’s ability to hear what they had to say, or not!

Being a first Sunday service and with the young people with us I thought we’d play a ‘Guess Who game’ which will hopefully help us to understand the readings a little better. I’ll give you some clues and you have to work out who it is!

First one -       born in Wednesbury in 1965.  
Spent 13 years as part of a local team  
Holds club record for number of goals scored -306 in total  
18 hattricks for the club  
Capped 13 times for England.

When Steve Bull started out, as a young footballer, I wonder if his friends and family could imagine how much of a huge local super star he would become! Hopefully they had lots of faith in him, and supported him. But maybe some people were a bit more cynical, or just couldn’t quite believe he could make it!

Second one       Played goal keeper in 1964  
Was made OBE  
Captained England from 1966 – 1978  
1<sup>st</sup> person to hit a 6 in a test match  
One of 10 to become member of MCC.

When Rachel Hey Hoe Flint said she wanted to play hockey and cricket, I wonder what the people around her thought. I bet many people, even those closest to her, just couldn’t get their heads around ‘it!

And finally       Born on the road, so to speak!  
Very practical with their hands  
Loved my many and loathed by authority. Yes Jesus!

All famous local people who we might have come across in our local area, apart from the last one who we also know very well but in a very different way! And if we spoke with them we would be impressed with their proficiency. And very proud of them. But I have no doubt that they faced cynics along the way – people who couldn’t get on board with the vision, for one reason or another.

So let’s have a more of a think about Jesus. He was a local lad, the son of a carpenter. He played with the other local kids and worked in his dad’s carpentry shop making tables and chairs. He was “one of them”, and in the reading he was trying to tell the people around the good news of God – but the people in his home town couldn’t accept it. How could he teach them – he was only a young whipper snapper from their village. They couldn’t accept him as anything special and therefore didn’t even try to listen to him. And because they didn’t want to listen, they had no chance to understand or accept what Jesus was talking about.

This attitude seems a bit harsh or closed minded to me. But thinking about it, I’m sure we all block our ears sometimes when there is something we don’t want to hear – dad calling from the kitchen asking for help with the washing up; or when the football is on and there is a shout – can you put the dustbins out please! Or will you

please turn that music down!!! Quite a different story if we are offered a chocolate biscuit, a raise in pay or a special discount ie something we want to hear, something that's familiar or easy or beneficial, or makes you feel special.

We all have selected hearing at times! As the saying goes, 'There's none so deaf as those who won't hear'.

The people in Jesus' home town just didn't want to understand. Who does he think he is! But this wasn't the case in many neighbouring towns. People flocked to hear Jesus speak. His words brought comfort and a sense of closeness which felt really good. He even did some miraculous healing. But this image, this of a local lad just didn't cut it for his fellow villagers!

And to a certain extent our minds sieve through information which comes to our ears and eyes. Some information we accept and other information we don't. Perhaps because we don't like what is being said or we don't believe it. The offer of a chocolate biscuit is very appealing, but cleaning out the rabbits somehow doesn't get the same response, because it demands something of us, something we don't want to do!

So, who do we think we are?

Let's explore that a bit further with the use of a sieve. The holes of the sieve are a particular size letting some bits through. All these different bits represent the people that we heard about in our reading. The small grains of flour are the people in the surrounding towns. They had already taken up God in their lives and were easily able to understand and believe what Jesus was saying.

Some bits need gentle coaxing – and with a bit of help also get through the holes. These are the people who hear the word and with encouragement, also get to understand power of God.

Other bits – these grains of rice -just won't go through however hard we try! These bits are like the people in Jesus' hometown who just didn't want to hear. And it's the same today – not everyone wants to hear the good news. They don't believe God exists – if he did, why do tragedies happen! They just cannot believe such a 'being' is viable.

The last few lines of the reading I have always puzzled over, as many of you too may have done so, but in writing this sermon I think I have come to have understood what it means. The line -

'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'.

I have always thought this as quite a vindictive move but it wasn't. It was a visual sign - a testimony- that the Gospel of repentance has been offered and refused. It was very important from the disciples' point of view, and indeed ours today that this message was given. It is the power of the Holy Spirit working through the disciples, and us today, that moves people to seek out Christ in their lives. We, as the disciples then, are the body of Christ here on earth. If people don't hear, don't listen and don't seek the joy and salvation Christ offers then we cannot do more than show them through the redemption of Christ in our own lives with our prayers and actions, like praying for 5 to come to Christ with the Diocesan initiative. It is the Holy Spirit working and not our own work. There are times when it is right to move on and leave the Holy Spirit to continue working in the hearts of the people who don't want to listen, through events and conversations we have, without us feeling weighed down by the rejection. This must have been particularly important for the disciples then – to feel they were not as powerful as their master. But they came to understand that it was the Holy Spirit empowered them, as he does us today.

So, who do we think we are?

We are all children of Christ whether we acknowledge it, or not, and our mission is to reflect God's love for all, through our own lives. Yes, we may meet hostility along the way, but it is the Holy Spirit which does the transformation along with our continued prayers, for all to seek out Christ.