

2 Corinthians 12: 2 – 10; Mark 6: 1 – 13

Jesus in Nazareth is unable to show God to those who are disdainful of his past, a bastard child, an insignificant manual worker and he is left frustrated. In this context of failure he sends out his disciples, with little visible support, to speak of repentance.

Paul, wound up by the members of the church at Corinth who deny his legitimacy as an apostle, sets out to explain that it is in his weakness that he is strong because it is then that the power of Christ dwells in him.

Later, when you have a moment, have a think about the Christians that you admire for their example of faithful living. I would be very surprised if the reason that you admire them is to do with their beauty, their personal financial success, or their position of privilege. It will be because they have some vulnerability or disability and in spite of that, they give with great generosity for the benefit of others.

I think of people of significant age who have not given up on caring for others; of people whose sexuality has made life difficult for them in the church and yet have demonstrated God's love both in their personal relationships and in their relationships with those who have been outspoken against them; of people who have exercised Christian mission in places they have been sent but to which they are unsuited because of a physical disability.

Where does this leave you and I? Is it possible to make it a goal to witness about God's love out of weakness? We fit in best with the world when we hide or disguise our weaknesses, when we proclaim our independence and deny our need for others.

Jesus, whether intentionally or not, showed his disciples that success was not a given. He sent them out to learn. He sent them out with another – perhaps for encouragement, for discipline, for safety, or, or maybe and, to ensure honesty. He sent them out without almost everything, perhaps to show them that they were good enough as they were – that even as they were they would be able to speak with God's authority.

Paul too had a long period between his dramatic experience of God and his travels and travails as a preacher, first being sent home to Tarsus when presumably he spent time considering this new understanding of God and then called to travel as an assistant to Barnabas.

Our life as Christians must be one of learning, learning about the character of God, learning how God shows his love for all that he has created, learning how to live following the example of Jesus.

If you have ever tried to teach anyone anything you will know that it is an impossible task if the student refuses to accept that they have a need to learn.

As Christians we are bound to acknowledge who we are, warts and all, and to approach the business of learning about the way of God with humility and earnestness. **Humility** because we will make mistakes and will have to try again, **humility** because we will have to learn that we are good enough in spite of our weaknesses to make a stand for Jesus, **humility** because we will not be able to assess our success by any set of targets, there will be no trophy to hold up, in this life at least!

Earnestness because the gift of faith is just that, a gift and one that should be celebrated, understood and shared. **Earnestness** because once you have glimpsed the hint of the possibility that God is more than a figment of the imagination, it is surely foolishness not to pursue the thought with serious intent. **Earnestness** because, well because this is God that we're looking at and God's inviting you in, and surely it can't get better than that!