

You Think You Know Them

Mark 6:1-29

Rev. Jason Forbes

Have you ever misjudged someone — completely underestimated them — only to be stunned by who they actually were?

Maybe it was a child, now grown and capable in ways you never imagined. Or someone you knew in school who now carries deep wisdom and strength.

Sometimes, the shock is not just at who *they've become*, but at how *wrong we were*.

Maybe it's a spouse, or a close personal friend, and you just learned something about them that you would never have guessed. You thought they were this person, but they turned out to be that person. Maybe even the opposite of who you thought they were.

It's disorienting. Because it means we might need to change how we see them — and maybe even how we see ourselves.

It's the same when it comes to Jesus. We hear something about Jesus, we learn some things about him and form a picture in our minds of who he is. But who Jesus actually is often turns out to be so much more than what we imagine.

That's the issue the people of Jesus' hometown are having in Mark 6. They thought they knew him. But Jesus' authority doesn't fit into their picture of him.

Mark draws our attention to this by telling us that "he went away from there" (v. 1). Well, where is "there"? "There" is where Jarius lived. Jarius was a Synagogue leader who had just made the difficult journey of putting his faith in Jesus that saw his daughter being raised from the dead (5:35-43).

Jesus has just come from being someone who put their faith in him, and now he has come to his own. So, the implicit question is, will his own put their faith in him? The answer is, sadly, no!

Well, why not? Because they think they know him when they don't. They think they know him, but they don't.

What Jesus starts doing in the synagogue no one would have expected. They are used to Jesus swinging a hammer. But when he starts swinging the scriptures and teaching with authority, people start saying, "hang on. This doesn't fit the picture! We know his family. They're a regular family from a regular town. Jesus hasn't studied. He's no academic! He is just a tradie, like the rest of us." (vv. 2-4).

Nothing wrong with tradies - by the way! But the point is that Jesus is coming across as something that they think he is not, and they are scandalized by this. They are shocked and horrified that one of their own would dare to claim to have the kind of authority like someone from Jerusalem where all the big wigs are.

Because they are so insistent that they know who Jesus is, they try to contain him. They want to define who Jesus is for themselves, and what he can and can't do. Jesus refrains from doing any further miracles there, not because he can only do miracles when people believe in him. Not at all. Jesus doesn't need people to believe in him to work miracles. The issue is if he does any more miracles, it will only scandalise people further and solidify them in their belief (vv. 5–6).

So why is it that Jesus can't be contained? Furthermore, why is it that we can't decide who Jesus is, and what he can and can't do? Because Jesus authority is far more extensive than what we often imagine. The number one point that Mark wants us to take from his gospel is that Jesus is the Son of God (1:1). As the Son, Jesus comes with God's authority, and he exercises that authority on God's behalf. That is an authority that outranks any other authority and cannot be defined by us in any way.

So, what does this authority look like? In 6:7 Mark tells us that Jesus called the Twelve and began to send them out. Well, of course he did because that's how we have come to know Jesus. And so, we missed just how radical this is.

In Jesus' day, disciples of a rabbi typically stayed close to their teacher. They followed him, learned from him, but were not sent out with authority to teach or act on his behalf. But Jesus does send out his disciples, and with authority.

Just as God sent Jesus with his authority, so now Jesus sends out the twelve with the exact same authority. We are talking about an

authority that isn't based on human ideas. We're talking about an authority that comes from God. This is the authority that Jesus has.

What is so unique about this authority? It's an authority that has command over demons and unclean spirits. Well, what does that mean? I could spend a long time talking about what that might mean. But I'm not going to. At least part of it means that when our fears are confronted with the authority of Jesus, the source of our fears becomes fearful.

I expect each of us to have our fears. Even if you're sitting there and thinking, "no, I don't have any fears. I'm tough!" I expect that if I pushed you far enough, you would be afraid of something. And I even expect as I was saying that some of your minds went to that very thing. When confronted with the authority of Jesus the source of our fears becomes fearful. I can't think of any other authority that can have that effect. Jesus' authority cannot be contained, and it cannot be defined. Because God defines it.

So why the travel light orders (vv. 8-10)? Commentators emphasize that the disciples need to be dependent on Jesus. And yes, that's part of it. But it's more than that. They are being sent as representatives of Jesus carrying his authority. What they took with them was to allow them to prioritize Jesus' authority. And that raises an interesting question.

What is preventing us from prioritizing Jesus' authority? Do we allow Jesus to be ruling over our fears? Or do we have a tendency to take everything, including the kitchen sink, when we go anywhere just in case something happens - I ask as one who drives a motor home!

But we get the point. So often fears drive us. They drive our decisions. When in fact Jesus' authority is sufficient for informing our decisions. When someone does provide for his disciples, Jesus wants his disciples to honour them by staying there. He doesn't want his disciples looking for a better offer. Again, this is to show Jesus' authority.

Not only does Jesus' authority have command over our fears, but Jesus' authority also extends past long held tradition and includes deciding who is in and who is out of God's covenant community (v. 12). At the time, being part of God's covenant community meant being part of the Jewish nation, Israel.

If a member of God's covenant community went outside of Israel into another nation, when they returned, they would shake the dust off their feet and clothes as a symbolic gesture of getting rid of anything impure.

If anyone did not listen to Jesus disciples, Jesus instructed them to shake the dust from their feet as an indication that they weren't part of God's covenant community. This is Jesus defining his people and saying who is in and who is out. This is immense authority.

“So,” Mark tells us, “they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.” (vv. 12–13).

What does this mean? Again, it could mean a number of things. Without getting bogged down in the medicinal practices of the day, at least part of what it means is that when the disciples went out, they addressed people's fears, identified their needs and did

something about it, as part of preaching the message of Jesus. At its simplest, that's what it means to be a representative for Jesus: addressing people's fears, recognizing their needs and doing something about it while telling them about Jesus. This is the authority that Jesus has.

This authority is very different to the authority the world uses, and the authority that we often use as individuals. Worldly authority defines and contains – it's an authority that seeks its own protection and good. It's an authority that turns out to be no authority at all.

We see this with Herod, who Mark refers to as King. Mark may be using this title as a means of mockery. Herod wanted to be king, but he was only one of four rulers governing the Roman Empire at the time. The use of the title King also denotes sovereignty. But as we will see, Herod was no sovereign. The nature of Herod's authority comes to light with the beheading of John.

We see that this is an authority that is easily frightened. Herod had heard of Jesus - and the teaching and miracles that not only Jesus but also his disciples had been doing. He concludes that Jesus must be John the Baptist raised from the dead. This is authority that is superstitious. This is authority that is fearful. This is authority that is founded on fear.

So, what was Herod so afraid of? He was afraid of being exposed. Herod had taken his brother's wife, Herodias, as his own, and John had been telling him that this was not on. Brave man! So, we have this awkward relationship where Herod respects John as a righteous

and holy man. But at the same time, he couldn't afford John telling his fellow Jews about Herodias. So, he seeks to contain John, quite literally, in prison. Herod is trying to decide what John can and cannot do.

Because of this fear, Herod's authority is easily overcome. Herodias sees an opportunity to outmanoeuvre her husband at his own birthday. What a keeper! Maybe Herod should have been listening to John! Herodias arranged for her daughter to dance for Herod and his guests. It must have been some impressive dance for Herod to then offer to her up to half of his kingdom. So, when the request for the head of John the Baptist came, he was in no position to deny such a request for fear of his guests.

There is the height of worldly authority. Outmaneuvered by a cunning woman, duped by a dancing girl, paralysed by friends and unable to save an innocent man's life. So, John is killed – murdered - because of an authority that had no authority at all.

This is not the kind of authority that Jesus exercises. Jesus' authority isn't superstitious. Instead, Jesus' authority is self-sacrificial. Jesus' authority does not seek its own protection and good. Instead, Jesus' authority seeks the protection and good of others. Jesus' authority doesn't seek to contain but seeks to liberate.

We know this because the Bible tells us that Jesus went to the cross willingly, to protect others from God's wrath that they might have eternal life. Rather than trying to contain us, Jesus liberates us from our sins and empowers us by his Spirit to live for God.

So, what about us? How are we going with responding to Jesus' authority?

Where are we trying to contain Jesus — to limit what he can do, how he can act, what he's allowed to ask of us? Where do our fears shape our decisions more than his authority? Who Jesus is ought to change us.

Maybe we're afraid of what others will think. Maybe we're clinging to comfort or control. Maybe we've misunderstood who Jesus really is — and what he wants for us.

Jesus is the Son of God, who has come with God's authority and exercises that authority on the behalf of God. He wants for us to be sent as his representatives, whatever our circumstance and context may be. To be liberated from our fears, and healed from our wounds - not just physically, but emotionally and mentally as well. He wants us to know that we are free and forgiven, and to walk with him.

When we begin to understand Jesus this way, then can we begin to really appreciate who he is.