

## ***Held Back by the Past***

Ezekiel 2:1-5; Psalm 123; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

*And he could do no deed of power there.*  
[Mark 6:5]

How many people here have embarrassing families? The sort that always bring things up from the past that you would rather they would not.

Does anyone want to share the things that their families use to embarrass them?

I am told that I used to set up the play pen as a Church and preach to my twin sister - and when she interrupted I would use violence to silence her stating 'I'm speaking!'

That leads to a more important question that arising in the readings for today.  
*How bound are we by our past?*

- ✦ Ezekiel - the prophet is sent to Israel, rebels, **whose descendants are impudent and stubborn.**

We are all products of our families and of our genes. Yet that can so easily be an excuse - if I hadn't changed the Doric language that is my mother tongue there is no way that I would be understood in Birmingham!

- ✦ Paul has his **thorn in the flesh** - something (and no one knows exactly what it was) from his past that has influence on the present.

Paul confesses that this is a good thing! If it weren't for that handicap he might be less useful to God because he might forget that it isn't him establishing the Church in the 1st century but God!

- ✦ Mark records that when Jesus was amongst his own **they took offence at him** and that **he could do no deed of power there.**

I first preached at home after my ordination and one old lady came up to me and reminded me of the time I wet my trousers in Church. It seems that Jesus had the same sort of community around him who defined him in the present by how they remembered his childhood.

So, what do you have to do to get free from the past?

- ✦ Jesus response was to move on. The practical advice he gave about accepting hospitality made sure that they had to engage with people: if you have no money, food or the ability to wash and get clean it sharpens up the mission! But it also keeps the mind clear - if you have to take nothing you don't have to decide what to pack and what it is that is important to have near you. Baggage is always difficult to carry!
- ✦ Ezekiel was clear that **whether they hear or refuse to hear** what was important that the prophet discharged his duty. So much of what we as individuals or the Church does or wants to do is hindered by looking over our shoulder worrying about how it is all received: we only have to be and do what God calls us to be and do!
- ✦ Paul is clear that the past led him to Christ and that Christ accepted him weakness-and-all and he focused all his energies on undoing the bad he had done.

If living in the past was disempowering for Jesus no wonder we struggle with the past!

The Christian message is clear too - the past can be forgiven but it can't be changed!

Three things can be changed by the grace of God:

I. We can!

II. The present, and

III. The future

A Ghanaian newspaper is reputed to have recorded the following piece of news: *'Ghana is to change over to driving on the right. The change will be made gradually.'*

Let's be sure that our past or what people expect of us doesn't mean we fear becoming the people God could make us.