

# Tall Poppy Syndrome

This morning I was both affronted and confronted by an incident. In the incident I was being treated as a person of no value. Words being used had strong barbs attached. Cruel, clear, smugly expressed. More unsettling were the unspoken words. The inferences. You could almost hear the whispers: "Got him, that'll bring him down a peg or two."

One of the disadvantages of success is the envy that accompanies it. A successful person is often perceived as a threat to others. Almost instinctively they want to compete, to conquer the person who is a threat to them. Here in Australia we call it rather obliquely, "Tall poppy syndrome."

Imagine for a moment what it was like for Jesus. He held the highest rank possible. Jesus is Lord of Lords, King of Kings, creator of everything that has been made, without end and without beginning. This person humbles himself, becomes a man while retaining all the properties of being God. Did people embrace Jesus? No! Pilate knew "it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him" Matthew 27:18.

Of people's reactions to Jesus Isaiah writes:

*"The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling,  
a scrubby plant in a parched field.  
There was nothing attractive about him,  
nothing to cause us to take a second look.  
He was looked down on and passed over,  
a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand.  
One look at him and people turned away.  
We looked down on him, thought he was scum"* Isaiah 53:2-3 [Message]

The NIV version expresses it this way:

*"He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.  
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.  
He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.  
Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised,  
and we esteemed him not"* Isaiah 53:2–3.

One of the things Jesus identifies that makes us "unclean" is the sin of envy. "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within you, and make you unclean" Mark 7:21–23.

It may be Australian to participate in the "tall poppy syndrome" but it is not Christian. Today we examine what could potentially happen after Jesus walks into the church at Ephesus, Revelation chapter 2:1-7. Jesus produces his score card on seven churches in Turkey. Jesus makes recommendations. He tells us how to turn a church around. Did they listen? No! The consequences were dire. Today, there is no church in Ephesus. Will we listen to what the Spirit says to the churches?