

Sunday 8th July 2018
Trinity 6 (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Ezekiel 2.1-5
NT: 2 Corinthians 12.2-10
G: Mark 6.1-13

There has been a lot of talk about homecoming in recent weeks or should that be coming home, we all know now that it is coming home., well regardless of the result we know that at some stage in the next week or so the England team will return home, let's hope that regardless of the result they will be welcomed back.

The idea of returning home is part of the human psyche, normally though when we return home the reaction is positive the welcome genuine. In this week's Gospel reading we start off with a homecoming of sorts. Jesus comes home to Nazareth, a town of about 300 people, historians think, so it's the sort of place where everybody knows everybody. According to Jewish custom, any Jewish male could be invited to speak in a synagogue and Jesus, a local boy come home, accepts the invitation. At first the reaction to his speech is amazement. Here he is, a "tekton," which is translated as carpenter but really might be better translated as "construction worker." That word referred to anyone who worked with his hands building things.

The amazement at the words and power of this local boy quickly turns to suspicion. The ones gathered in the synagogue know who Jesus is: a construction worker, son of an undistinguished local family. And we know, from our reading a couple weeks ago, that even Jesus' family thinks he's gone a little crazy.

They label Jesus not by his father, as was the custom, but by his mother... hinting, in a vulgar way, at illegitimacy. And so they dismiss him- he couldn't be a prophet, because he's just a lowly carpenter. All too often, we are tempted to do the same, reducing someone who challenges us to a single attribute about that person – whether skin color or age or orientation

– in order to dismiss them and thereby fail to receive the wholeness of the person God has created and redeemed and offered to us as a gift.

The gospel reading straddles a hinge in the story Mark tells of Jesus. Up until now, Mark's action-packed gospel has been a whirlwind of story to tell us about who this Jesus is. First, Mark introduces the context of Jesus' ministry (coming after John the baptiser and having rejected the temptation of Satan). Second, we are told about Jesus' healing ministry (which continues to tell us contextually more about who Jesus is, in relation to the forgiveness of sins (Mk 2:1-12), the Sabbath (Mk 2:23-3:12), and demons (3:20ff, 5:1- 20), while along the way the disciples are picked up. Then we're introduced to Jesus' use of parables (in chapter 4), and a further two great healing miracles (releasing the man possessed by Legion demon, and restoring a little girl to life (chapter 5).

Only now, at chapter 6, do we get a moment to pause. Having found Jesus 'out and about', Mark takes us alongside Jesus as He returns home. We, together with the Nazarenes who hear Him in the synagogue, are now able to ask: 'Who is this man? Where did He get all this?' Unlike them however, Mark would not have us surprised by Jesus' power: where they cannot see past their familiarity with Jesus the wood-worker –Mary's son, and brother to James, Joses, Judas and Simon, with sisters too– we have been shown Jesus the healer, teacher, miracle-worker. The question of who Jesus is, has by Mark 6:6, been answered.

So, Mark, having allowed us a pause as Jesus goes home, turns to telling us about the action plan coming next. The focus leaves Jesus for a second and turns to those around Him: the disciples. Now that we know who Jesus is, what shall be the response of those who follow Him? For the disciples, the task is to go and preach a message of repentance; equipped with nothing but their sandals and the tunic on their back. Despite the paucity of their materials, we are told in verse 13 that, empowered by Christ's command, much was achieved through the disciples.

The defining paradox of our faith involves the proclamation that in Jesus Christ we are dealing with the One who is perfectly God and perfectly human. The Chalcedonian Creed of 451 AD lays out the classic parameters for how we might (and might not) conceive of Christ's divine and human natures, but this complex formula is not just the sort of question for specialist theologians indulging in careful metaphysical discernment. In our gospel reading, we come right up against the same question, this time in the mouths of those who have known Jesus His whole life: "Where did this man get these things? ...Is this not Jesus the wood-worker?" In this reading, Jesus seems most human: we learn about His brothers and sisters. We can wonder whether Jesus being referred to as the "son of Mary" in v3 means that Joseph has now died. We're told of His trade, and can think about Jesus the joiner: presumably doing work for some of these Nazarene villagers? In other words, the same Jesus who we worship is, in this passage, very much 'one of us'. In fact, it is precisely because Jesus is 'one of us' that His hometown folk can't see Him for who we –as readers of Mark's gospel– know Him to be: it doesn't make sense to them.

It is a version of this paradox that Paul draws upon in the 2 Corinthians reading. Again, it doesn't seem to make sense that wisdom draws from foolishness, that strength is made perfect in wisdom: but this is the Truth of Jesus Christ. The invitation in a sermon on these passages is to spend time with this paradox, and to thoroughly examine our own concepts of power and weakness, wisdom, and foolishness. Do we have room in our thinking for the paradox that Paul tells us of? Or do we too quickly collapse our understanding into some simplistic version of 'might is right' or 'knowledge = power'. Ultimately, as the gospel reading shows, getting our thinking right on this is about being faithful to the fact of who our God is, the divine human Jesus Christ.

This passage ends with healing and anointing- we are all anointed as God's own. It gives us a little glimpse of the kingdom: Those who are sick will be anointed as God's beloved. Those who are weak will be made strong. For, as Paul, another prophet who was also fairly

unpopular, said in his letter to the Corinthians, "in our weakness God's power is made perfect."

There is a danger - in our Christian lives - that we too can miss out on God's blessings - because we fail to recognise God's messenger.

The people in Nazareth lost out - as the Scriptures sadly records: "He (Jesus) could not do any miracles there (in Nazareth), except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them." (Mk 6:5) because of their unbelief.

We see in contrast in the second part of our Gospel reading this morning (Mark 6:7-13) the great miracles that the disciples did - when Jesus sent them out into the surrounding villages. Why because their message of repentance was received with faith.

We can expect great things from God when we respond to God's word – regardless of who brings it.

We should be open to hear from God from the most unexpected sources – perhaps even from our nearest and dearest and those in the pews around us!

For we don't - we may make the same mistake as those Nazarenes - who were looking for the Messiah - but missed Him when He came home .

Its coming home: may we be found ready.

Fr Bill Addy