

St George's Anglican Church Malvern

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost Year B

5 July 2015

Ezekiel 2.1-15 Psalm 123 2 Corinthians 12.2-10 Mark 6.1-13

Jesus goes home to Nazareth, and his new friend, his disciples come with him. He is invited to preach in the synagogue. Jewish men who were thought to have something worthwhile to say would be asked to do that. At first, Jesus' words astound his hearers. They want more; they want to know the source of such wisdom. But then, as mobs will do, they remember that they know this man and take back the honour they first bestowed. Jesus is just one of them – well, even a bit of a questionable 'one of them'.

Jesus is the carpenter; the artisan who works with building materials. Such people were not top of the list in the honour stakes because they usually had to leave their villages to find work. That meant leaving the women - their wives, sisters and mothers - at home without a male protector to guard the family's honour. When that happened, the man was said to be 'without shame' and not paying sufficient attention to the requirements of honour.

But then, there is more that causes the mob to question their initial response. They know Jesus' mother and his brothers and sisters. He is the son of – oh yes, the son of Mary! Now, that is an odd way to speak about anyone in Jesus' culture. Jesus should be *Jeshua ben Youseff* not *Jeshua ben Mariam!* You know the sort of thing I mean, it happens all the time in the scriptures. Remember when the first disciples are called; for example, James and John are identified as the two with those names who are the sons of Zebedee.

So, although at first they do recognise that Jesus has wisdom to teach them, they withdraw their approval – in fact they take offence at him. Jesus must have anticipated that because he is ready with a proverb for those who now want to shame him. "A prophet is not without honour except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house", he says. Jesus shames them before they can shame him.

But actions have consequences. Because his village cannot open themselves to his teaching, nor acknowledge that God has sent him to them and so trust him – the dynamics of the relationship we call faith – Jesus can do nothing for them. They have pre-judged him and now their prejudice blinds them. Jesus is amazed at their lack of trust in God – their unbelief.

Their attitude is the opposite of that in the prayer of the psalmist today. Did you notice how the psalmist sees himself/herself as a child trusting God who is imaged as male or female since both metaphors are equally prayerful.

Do you see how this story makes it clear *that faith is a relationship*? Our faith is not a series of propositions to which our assent is required, but a relationship with the God who is creator of all this is, seen and unseen, and with Jesus the risen Christ in whom God has entered into our world, to get alongside us and change us through a relationship. It takes two to have faith – the God who invites our trust, and we who give it willingly, in company with Jesus.

It is easy but cheap to think the people in Nazareth got it wrong about Jesus, but we haven't. Are we so different now? Look at the world we live where fewer and fewer people take much notice of the rumour about God. Look at the landscape of thinking about these things we inhabit now. Freud said religion was just a human projection of our inner desires. Marx said it was a way of keeping oppressed peoples in their place. Nietzsche said Jesus taught a religion fit only for wimps that sapped the real energy out of humanity ever since. Dawkins and the other strident atheists say God is a delusion. Most people have found ways to live without any sense of a greater power than themselves, or a grander narrative than the present. Or, they have relegated God to the gaps in human knowledge or capacities. Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and martyr warned us about that years ago. This is the cultural landscape we inhabit. It's not surprising that it is still true the Word of God comes to his own – humanity – and his own people do not receive him.

This landscape makes faith more difficult in our unpromising times, but as I said last week about Peter and Paul's leadership of the early church, the times have often been unpromising.

In every age the church exists to live the truth about God made known to us in Jesus. The Church is what God has now that Jesus has ascended to heaven which is a poetic way to say, Jesus is where God is and what God is. Jesus has exhibited God, revealed God, that is to say shown forth in his life and death the character of God. As church our call is to do the same now, not because we possess Jesus, but because we are possessed by him and live following him.

Here are some things the Church has come to say, over the centuries of encounter, about Jesus, the risen Christ:

Jesus Christ is truly human, as human as you and me.

Jesus Christ is truly God; God from God, of one substance with God, as the creed puts it

Jesus Christ is one; divine and human in one person; the eternal Word, that is to say the eternal self-communication of God.

Human beings always were and are created after the pattern of the same eternal image of God that has become incarnate, become flesh in Jesus.

God's redemption of the world, and of us, is in and through a person: Jesus Christ. The total life-journey of Jesus Christ – from his birth, to his ministry of teaching and healing, to his death and resurrection – is the saving event. It is God's doing for all people of every time and place.

All that seems a long way from a Saturday, a Sabbath in Nazareth when his own people rejected Jesus. But is it? Every journey in faith begins with our response to God in Jesus, and will, when we love God with all our 'heart and soul and mind and strength' mean we want to grow in understanding of the faith we embrace.

So what of us here today? Can we welcome Jesus among us, individually and together, in such a way that he can teach us and do deeds of power among us?

Colleen O'Reilly