

Back home

8 7 12

O God, the protector of all who trust in you,
without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:
increase and multiply upon us your mercy;
that with you as our ruler and guide
we may so pass through things temporal
that we lose not our hold on things eternal.

Our text is taken from today's gospel from Mark chapter 6 and verse 2:

' . . . and many who heard him were astounded.'

Jesus has come home. He's back in Nazareth with the twelve disciples. It's Saturday morning, Shabbat, the Sabbath day, and as is their custom, a custom Jesus has followed since he was a boy here, he goes with his friends and followers to synagogue. Now Jesus has a reputation as a wandering, miracle-working rabbi so it's no surprise that those in charge of the synagogue there should invite a son of their village to preach to them. And he does. And the effects are according to some astounding, astonishing, surprising.

I don't know if you were here last Sunday but the service itself was great. There were about 150 of us here to remember the life of one of the pillars of our church – Elizabeth Hannay – 'une grande dame' in her own right without whom this church would not be open today. Canon Roger Gilbert preached. And there were

three baptisms with three small children being baptised by John and Mark and me. It was a wonderful service even though it easily extended well beyond our normal hour. But it was worth it and afterwards I had a piece of cake and wine. And behind the table, helping to serve, was a fresh-faced, curly-haired, blond American teenager with whom I briefly talked. He told me he was his mother's youngest son, her baby ! And I smiled at him and said me too and that to his mum, he would always be so - her baby, even into his middle age and beyond !

And that is precisely the problem with today's passage. What was exciting and should have been good news and a great occasion - the homecoming of someone famous to their hometown turns sour. The word Mark uses to describe their reaction is **astonished** - so surprised that they are stopped in their tracks as if turned to stones. And this is how Mark describes their reaction: **'Where did this man get all this ? What is this wisdom that has been given to him ? What deeds of power are being done by his hands ! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us ?'** (6 v2/3)

It's fascinating to see their response. This boy-made-good astonishes them. They knew him as a boy, as a young carpenter but not as a rabbi, a teacher, a preacher and worker of miracles. So they ask what I guess is a reasonable question - where does he get it all from ? Two things they wonder at: his wisdom and his ability to perform miracles. So where does he get it from ? And sadly they don't get it. Because they are his neighbours, folk who know his family, know Jesus as boy and man and his mum and brothers and sisters, they don't

recognise him as the Messiah, their Christ. For them, he will always be simply Mary's son, Joseph's boy, a carpenter like his dad. For them, he simply can't be anything more because that is how he was to them and they can't adjust how they now see him. And so as Mark writes – **they took offence at him** and I guess reject him in their hearts. Jesus sums up the whole for us with a pithy memorable phrase – **'Prophets are not without honour except in their home town and among their own kin and their own home.'** (v4) Oops – not good!

It seems to me there is a parallel between what happened in Nazareth with what later will happen in Jerusalem and what is happening with the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus is rejected because of who he is – a boy from Nazareth, not one of them. He does not match their expectations. Jesus of Nazareth is not what they were expecting so they will get rid of an inconvenience by having him killed.

And it occurs to me that the same is happening now. Jesus and the way to God through him which we call Christianity is rejected because it does not connect certain people with God, a sense of otherness, a sense of awe and wonder that is at the heart of our encounter with deity. And why not ? Perhaps it is an overfamiliarity with the Jesus of our childhood, the Jesus we read about in school. Perhaps such a rejection is not so much a rejection of who Jesus truly is but a rejection of our inadequate overfamiliarity with someone he's not.

Personally, any encounter with the real thing, the real person that Jesus was and is, would be life-changing and transformational. So let me leave you with this thought from another gospel – the opening chapter of St John's where Jesus is

pictured as the Word of God, as a light shining in the darkness. He is described being in the world but the world not knowing him; of coming to his own but his own rejecting him. But for those who did accept him, they were to become the Children of God.

As ever, the choice is ours: to accept or to reject. What will you choose ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

8th July, 2012

H: Sermon 26 : Back home

