

The Ordinariness of Jesus...

... causes offence.

A sermon given on the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, 7th July 2024 – by the Curate, the Revd Charlie Shefford, in Beverley Minster.

Mark 6:1-13

If the general elections of 2019 and last Thursday have taught us anything, it's that there's no such thing as a safe seat, and we see this truth in this morning's gospel: Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth; his family and friends; to the people who have raised him and supported him; the people he has grown up alongside; the people who have had the most experience of his gentleness, kindness, and love; the people you would most expect to accept Jesus. And after all, up to this point, Jesus had been having a remarkably good run: he cast out demons and healed many in Capernaum; he went on a preaching tour of Galilee, drawing huge crowds and healing people; and just before the events of this morning's gospel, he raised a synagogue leader's daughter back to life from the dead. And now he returns to his hometown to continue his ministry of teaching and healing. In his own hometown, they don't accept Jesus - they reject him.

And it isn't immediately obvious why this should be the case. When they first hear him teaching in the synagogue, we are told those listening were astounded, saying to one another, *'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are done by his hands?'* And then all of a sudden, the mood shifts. They begin saying, *'Wait a minute. Is not this the Carpenter, the Son of Mary?'* And they begin to take offence at him. And what they take offence to is the sheer ordinariness of Jesus: he is not an educated rabbi who grew up studying under the best scholars - he is a carpenter; he is not of noble birth, not from a royal bloodline - he is just the son of Mary. Their real gripe it seems, is how someone so ordinary can presume to teach them. And this may at first seem slightly strange: if he has wisdom, if he heals, then why should his ordinariness matter? I think even today, the ordinariness of Jesus is a stumbling block to many, both inside and outside the church. We believe in a Jesus Christ who is fully divine, that is all powerful, all knowing, as well as being at the same time fully human, fully ordinary. In the Nicene Creed, which we will shortly say together: we affirm that *'We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God.'* And conceptually, intellectually, theologically, emotionally, we can in principle at least, accept the

God who is all-powerful and who, precisely because he is all-powerful, is far off and distant, cold and wrathful.

But God's power is not human power. Jesus shows us that true power is choosing to become weak, choosing to serve others rather than to be served. The creed continues, *'For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man.'* People today will often ask (in order to make the point that if there is a God, He must be cruel, distant, uncaring, unconcerned, and unable to relate to humankind) questions like, 'Does God know anything about pain and suffering; about fear, hunger, loneliness, and desperation?' And the answer is 'Yes'. St Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians (2:7) that Jesus *'Emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.'* In Christ, God took on the vulnerability and limitations of our humanity. God knows what it is to be human and to suffer as humans do. And it is precisely in his weakness, gentleness, kindness, in his human ordinariness that God draws near to us and meets us in the person of Jesus Christ.

But why do we find it so hard to accept these qualities in Jesus? I think it is because in many instances, we find ourselves in the same mindset as Jesus' hometown. We can understand a God who uses his power to become a tyrant, but not a God who uses his power to become weak. Perhaps this is because in a strange sense, a distant cold God of tyranny doesn't demand as much of us as a gentle God of weakness. Because if God is a tyrant, we can justify the times when we want to act as a tyrant. If God is cold and distant, we can justify the times when we want to be cold and distant. But if God is gentle, kind, loving, and weak, that means that we are called to be as well.

In his second letter to the Corinthians (12:9), St. Paul whilst in prayer, hears Jesus say to him, *"Power is made perfect in weakness."* So St Paul declares that he boasts of his weakness, confident that Christ is nearest to him when he is weak- and so when he is weak, then he is strong.

So if we are to follow Christ, to follow his example of self-emptying, this means emptying ourselves of pride and taking on humility; to serve others rather than expecting to be served ourselves; and to empty ourselves of our desire for power, and instead to accept the weakness of Christ.

Reading Text

¹He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, '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! ³Is 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?' And they took offence at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.