

4th July 2021 – Pentecost +6 – Chris’s Sermon.

Mark 6: 1-13

In our Gospel reading, Jesus returns to his hometown with the disciples. And, on the Sabbath, we’re told that he went to the synagogue. He prayed and then he offered some guidance to the people gathered around him – he continued his teaching ministry.

But, according to the story, not everything went according to plan; he wasn’t well received by some of the people. We’re told that some of the people were offended by his words – offended by his presence. Some said, ‘Is this not the carpenter – the son of Mary...’

In other words, among the crowd, there were some sceptics, who spoke up and challenged Jesus (the ones who felt angry or even threatened by his words). So, there were some people in the crowd who couldn’t see the wisdom of God in Jesus (in his words or his ministry) – and they dismissed him. In my mind’s eye, I can see them turning away – I can see them labelling him – a simple uneducated carpenter – unqualified to speak.

...Is this not the carpenter – the son of Mary...?

I think these words were said to chip away at Jesus – to undermine his authority – to deny his right to speak (and, ultimately, to deny the wisdom of God that was present in his message). Whenever I look at this reading, I wonder if some of the criticism was coming from a group of people who felt threatened – people who wanted to defend their own authority to teach and lead the people. Perhaps, they saw Jesus as a distraction – perhaps they were unwilling to acknowledge the truth in what Jesus was saying because it wasn’t convenient (closed minded).

And, I imagine their attitude and their words cut Jesus deeply. Our reading is an example of the negativity and the hostility that Jesus experienced, both at home and in the towns of Galilee (these are people who knew him).

If nothing else, our reading reminds us that scepticism can be corrosive. There’s an incredible irony in this reading. When describing Jesus as the carpenter – the son of Mary, the sceptics claim that they know Jesus, while demonstrating an unwillingness to really see him. (They recognised him as the carpenter, but they didn’t really know him – they couldn’t see the God within him.)

In a broader sense, I think our reading also serves to remind us of the challenges that we will experience, as we work to share the good news with those around us – we too will meet our fair share of sceptics and doubters. We talked about this last week. Peter was called (girded for ministry) – led out into the world to preach the gospel and share the good news. And, he wasn’t always well received. Like Peter (and Jesus in our reading today) we too are called to stand firm – to preach the gospel and share the good news.

But, we live in a world where this message will sometimes be dismissed or ignored because it's not convenient to hear (or easy).

Like Jesus, at times we too will be labelled - characterised as simple or naïve or misguided or foolish because of our faith. This negativity and blindness can cut us, especially when it comes from the people who should know better – the ones with whom we share our lives.

I can remember the early conversations that I shared with some of my friends when I was still thinking (and praying) about my calling to ministry. On one occasion, a good friend of mine became quite argumentative (even a bit angry) when he heard that I was leaving work to study for ministry. He was sceptical – he thought that there must be some angle – some hidden or selfish motive.

And, looking back, I found myself questioning his attitude – I wondered if he really knew me at all. After sharing a friendship that stretched back over many years, he couldn't see why this was important.

I think this is similar to the experience that Jesus had in the synagogue.

Ministry is demanding, especially when it calls us to challenge the beliefs and expectations of those around us. At times, we won't conform to the expectations of those around us. At times, we will see this tension reflected in our friendships and our families.

As with Jesus, we are called to meet these difficult situations with understanding and conviction – to stand fast to the truth that we have been given.

Jesus is our example. He understands and accepts the viewpoint of those who doubt him, without trying to change them. He knows that a change of heart must come from within these people. But, at the same time, he doesn't let the sceptics and the cynics determine or define the person that he is called to be. (He is steadfast.)

As members of the church – called to serve and share the good news, I pray that we will give consideration to this reading. Like Jesus, we are called to speak God's truth – to speak out against injustice – to support the poor and the marginalised – to offer care to the sick - to welcome the outcast. And, this message won't always be welcome.

I pray that we will keep this reading in mind, when responding to those who would silence us – those who would deny our message or the wisdom of God that we are called to share.

The Lord be with you.