

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2024, Trinity VII

**Mark 6:1-6 'And he was amazed at their unbelief'.**

He was amazed at their unbelief.

We don't often think of Jesus being amazed, do we? Jesus is the one in control, the one never lost for words, always there with the brilliant answer, the clever solution. He is, after all, God incarnate.

So to think of him standing there, open-mouthed, at a loss ... that's quite something.

He was amazed at their unbelief.

Now, it wasn't that the people of Nazareth couldn't see Jesus was a brilliant preacher. Nor did they deny that he could do astonishing things. They knew both these things. After all, they ask, '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?' They believed the teaching was amazing; they believed the miracles. And yet: he was amazed at their unbelief.

What's going on? What exactly *is* their unbelief?

It's the failure to see that though he is a brilliant teacher, though he does these deeds of power, matters can't stop there. The teaching and the deeds mean something. They make a claim. They say, the One you've been waiting for is here. Indeed, more even than that, if you press them. If he raises the dead, if he stills the storm – the stories we've had in the last two weeks – well, who then is this? The teachings and the miracles are all a great big claim: that the King is here. That God is here. As St. Paul would later put it, in Jesus Christ all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell. That's the claim.

And if the claim is true, then when you meet him, everything has to change. This is the person you were made for. This is the person your life is all about. This is the person that makes earthly kings, ordinary kings, look small, because next to Him they are small. This is the person that defines everything about you.

*That's* what the people of Nazareth didn't like. What, *Jesus*? Mary's son? The carpenter? We know him. That can't be. We're not re-arranging our lives round Him.

And he was amazed at their unbelief.

I wonder if He was stood here today, whether he would also be amazed?

Now, we do believe, of course. In a few moments, we'll all say the Creed, and probably we mean most of it: God of God, light from light, true God from true God, of one being with the Father ... we believe.

But do we really?

Because if we did, you might think that our allegiance to Christ, our devotion to Him, our doing our duty by Him, would be the single most important thing in our lives. That, for instance, we might be spending serious time, day in, day out, praying. Reading the Bible. Receiving the sacrament every single week, without fail, doing everything we possibly could to show our love for Him, to deepen our communion with Him. That would seem to follow, wouldn't it? And yet ... does it? Would someone looking at your life say that is your absolute, number one priority?

And He was amazed at their unbelief.

Or, if you think, quite correctly, that's there more to being Christian than prayer – well, OK, we would be doing our very, very best to make our lives like He wants them. We would, for instance, be radically generous with our money, with our judgements, with our time. We would forgive each other, even those who have done us serious harm. We would be people who served the poor, the weak, the vulnerable; we would be serious about bringing others to know Jesus. We would be all that, and much more. Are we?

And he was amazed at their unbelief.

How do we know who Jesus is, how do we sort of say yes to Him, and yet fail to follow it through – fail to love Him with all our hearts, all our minds, all our strength and all our soul? It is perverse. It is amazing.

Sermons however, it may surprise you to learn, are not to be meant to be harangues. They're not meant to make you feel bad. They are meant to announce Good News, to proclaim what God has done.

So what has He done? What He do about the fact that everywhere he looks, even in his Church, he sees people who will not love Him, who will not love their neighbours, who are stuck and small and selfish? Does he just grieve? Does he just sit there, with his head in his hands, amazed? Or does he shout and complain and tell us to try harder? Come on, people, shape up! Be better!

No. This is the Gospel. God doesn't just shout at the world. He says, 'I'll become part of it. I'll put myself right into the very heart of my people's failure. I'll go where they've gone. I'll go to the very furthest point away from me, to the place which is the opposite of my Kingdom, the opposite of love and joy and peace. I'll go right into the heart of their 'No', I'll go right into the disaster. I'll go there, and I'll do it for them. I will live the life they should have lived, the life of perfect love. And I will die the death they die now, in all its misery and pain and defeat.

And here is the great secret, the great divine master-stroke: because I take their death, they can have my life. Because I take their death, they can have my life. My life of perfect love, perfect rightness - they can have it. I'll give it to them. I won't wait for them to get it right by themselves. Imagine waiting for St. Lawrence to whip himself into shape! Imagine waiting for Waddell! I'd be waiting a long time. He has no real faith of his own. He has no real love, no real glory. And he's never going to get it. It's beyond him. So I'll give him mine, on that Cross.

When God looks at you, what does he see? He sees his Son. He sees Jesus, who has gone right into the heart of your no, your failure to love Him, your failure to really believe. Right into the heart of your disaster, so He can fill it with his glory. Who has taken your selfish, broken little life, and made it part of His. When God looks at you, he sees Jesus. That's the basis of all our hope. It's why He doesn't turn away, amazed, grieving. It's why each one of us, sinners as we are, has a destiny beyond imagining. It's why we give thanks to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.