

## Wednesday Reflection by David Kennedy

Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. <sup>2</sup>On 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! <sup>3</sup>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?" And they took offense at him. <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown and among their own kin and in their own house." <sup>5</sup>And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup>And he was amazed at their unbelief. *Mark 6. 1-6*

I once remember when I was much younger a fraught PCC meeting where it had been suggested that a member of the congregation might be authorized to administer the chalice at Holy Communion. At that time, this was quite a new development in the life of the Church. There were objections, and the main argument seemed to be – 'Our clergy are appointed from outside the parish, but we know this person and we don't think that that this person is worthy to administer something as holy as the Sacrament.' There was an implication that the person in question might not be in line to be canonised as a Saint! And a rather curious idea that the clergy are whiter than white; that they alone were worthy. And I was troubled that at least some members of the PCC could not quite accept that we are all sinners, less than perfect, but by God's grace we can be changed and transformed, and part of that is about maturity and becoming more Christ-like.

So, Jesus came back to Nazareth his home town and was invited to give the sermon at the synagogue. And clearly, it was a cracking and probably challenging sermon. But rather than rejoice in God's grace active in Jesus, some of the congregation reacted negatively. 'Where did this this man get all this learning?' How can he preach such a wise and informed sermon? And what is the source of all these mighty deeds we are told he is doing? For heaven's sake, this is the carpenter's son; he's just a local lad. We know his mother and his brothers and sisters – they're ordinary enough! So where on earth did he get all this authority to dare to speak to us like this? Who does he think he is? And we are told that they took offence at him; they were scandalized by him. They resented him, and cast doubts about him; perhaps secretly they were jealous.

And Jesus responded with what have been a kind of proverb – that prophets are honoured everywhere except in their own back yard, in their home town, among the people they grew up with and even in their own family. Mark tells us elsewhere that there were those in Jesus' immediate family who did not believe in him.

But there is a sting in the tail of this gospel reading. We are told that Jesus could not perform any deeds of power there, except that he did heal some people, but the implication is he would have done so much more but he was inhibited, prevented, thwarted – by what? By their unbelief, which astonished him and I guess greatly distressed him.

This is a reminder to us of how important it is to exercise faith in Jesus. If faith is not active in us, but becomes dormant or cynical, we can limit God's gracious action among us.

To return to that PCC meeting. Of course, Jesus is sinless but we are all sinful. We all fall short of what God desires and demands of us. But I wonder what all those negative attitudes in that Church Council disabled in the life of that Church. I wonder what God might have done there, but couldn't do, because those attitudes, that lack of acceptance and perhaps cynicism, prohibited God's gracious work. The worst cases in the Church in my experience are those who become negative about everything, just as the people of Nazareth were so negative about Jesus. For this type of attitude brings on a kind of spiritual blindness – no longer able to see the grace of God or the new thing that God is doing. Saddest of all, it distresses the Lord for it ultimately betrays a lack of faith, an attitude of unbelief.

But when we together exercise faith, and look to see what God is doing and what he is calling all of us to be and to become, then things happen and the Church moves forward and we see the grace of God among us. So the moral is – exercise your faith – your faith in the living God.