

Mark 6: 1-13 - 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Trinity - 8 & 10:00 AM -  
Response to Adversity

One of the challenges of reading the Bible, is that it is sometimes difficult to apply it to our experience. But, Jesus - unlike the world cup - has already come home here.

We find him in the synagogue. You would think that his local synagogue would be pleased to see him, eager to learn from him. But they aren't.

We have a recent comparison here. Last week, we welcomed back Mark Boyling, a previous vicar at St Peter's for our patronal festival. For many of you, it was lovely to see Mark and Helen again - to catch up about life events gone-by, find out what they were up to.

I'm sure that these things were the same for Jesus in Nazareth. But the trouble came when he began to teach. In Jesus' day, the Scripture readings would be read and then a discussion would be had on them - usually with an opening reflection by the rabbi, or a visiting preacher.

(If you'd like more discussion than we give you on a Sunday - think about joining one of the Bible Study groups advertised on the bulletin)

But imagine if Mark had stood in the pulpit to preach last week, and as he spoke, we had turned surly. Who does he think he is? How has he learned these things? How presumptuous is he being? The mood gets darker, and darker, until his friends and earliest acquaintances, reach for the proverbial tomato - or even a stone...

We didn't of course. Mark spoke eloquently and with the acumen he was valued at St Peter's for. We were pleased to catch up. An old church family is a different family. But for Jesus, the experience was different - as I have described.

To understand our reading, we have to understand what Jesus represented to those people who remembered him from the early days. And the lesson of this reading is two-fold: one is a warning to us to watch our presumptions and prejudices. The second is our response to adversity.

In Nazareth, Jesus would have followed the usual patterns - here he trained as a 'tekton', a builder, labourer, journeying artisan - after his father. Here he attended the temple, studied the scripture, grew in wisdom.

And then, like a youth going away on a gap year or to university, or someone going to work abroad, Jesus left Nazareth. And because the gospel does not tell us

otherwise, it may have been his first time back in his hometown - the place where he was known by everybody, and had always been known.

But like someone who works abroad and comes back, full of different experiences, the change in them is sometimes unsettling. They are the same person you knew as a small child, but different. More than merely taller, but more sure of themselves, able to join in with the discussions of their elders with ease.

Jesus goes beyond that image in this text - indeed, we have an example of Jesus' extraordinariness here. It is proved because He shocks the people who theoretically should have known him most deeply. They ask: Where did this man get these things? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, son of Mary and brother of James and Judas and Simon?

The reaction of the synagogue and acquaintances in the synagogue in Nazareth is a warning to us about becoming stagnant - becoming a small bubble - rejecting development, new ideas, new people because they don't fit in with how things have always been done. To avoid this insular mind-set, we must communicate our thoughts beyond our like-minded groups, openly and graciously.

So, in response to the synagogue's reaction to Jesus, have the second portion of our reading - his response to adversity.

Jesus realised that his preaching in his own town would not work. He marvels at their lack of belief and mildly repeats the old proverb, probably with a wry smile, that 'no one is a prophet in their home-town'.

Jesus' response is to maximise on the lesson he learns. His experience has been rejection, so he looks further afield - more widely than the limits of his own town. As Christians, God calls us - if not geographically, then socially and spiritually to expand our horizons and deepen our faith.

So Jesus sends the local fisher-lads out. Beyond Nazareth, perhaps even, heaven forbid, beyond their home-town of Capernaum. He sends them out, with just their wits, to spread the word through conversation and example. But he sends them out deliberately to build relationships. We can see a parallel in Russia - far outside the church - with the England manager, Gareth Southgate.

He's not quite on the same level as Jesus - although I'm sure some might raise him there if football does come home - but Southgate has inspired the team to go out and perform in different situations.

Jesus sent the twelve out, to share the God's love and build relationships outside this building.

An opportunity for us to do this is coming up. In March, 31 Bishops, each with a team of people, from across the Northern province are coming to the Diocese of Liverpool as part of a big mission event. These teams will be wanting to know how they can support the outreach of our local churches. This gives us a chance to reflect about how we share our faith in ways that build relationships with others. To think about what our home-coming welcome is like.

So, in the back of our minds, hold the example of Jesus as he sent out the twelve - to show God's love in a demonstratable way.

Because Jesus' experience of going home showed him - and us - that little good comes of standing still. When God's love is shown by Christians in our world - our church is transformed. So is the world.

And for even one person, what a home-coming that may be.

Amen.