

Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> June

Sermon by the Reverend Ish Smale, Cathedral Deacon

***Genesis 27: 1-40***

***Mark 6: 1-6***

In the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Returning to a place where many childhood years have been spent can produce wonderful happy memories... or in contrast, it can re-awaken bad and sad reflections of the past.

I was raised in a close-knit Christian community which even had its own school. But when I was 12 the school closed down and I was transferred to the local secondary modern school.

From day one I knew I was going to be the odd boy out. My strict religious upbringing taught me that swearing, smoking, stealing and drinking alcohol were all sins, yet these things seemed to be quite normal to a lot of the boys in my class.

I very rarely lose my temper and to this day, I have never been able to hit anyone in anger. Yet now I faced some aggressive teachers and pupils. Whilst some of the teachers took their anger out on the pupils, some of the pupils took their anger out on fellow pupils ...often resulting in viscous bloody fights in the playground called bundles.

Bullies ruled the classroom if a teacher was gentle and passive, and, needless to say, these really nice teachers rarely lasted more than a term.

I was shocked when one teacher went into great detail explaining the most effective way to stick a knife into someone to cause maximum damage, and that was in a maths lesson. For me it was like living in another world... and one I hated.

Although I made many friends, I was so glad to leave the school and get a job at the age of 15.

Yet many years later I had to return to my old school as we planted a Church there. On first entering it after many years, all sorts of memories flooded back...not many were happy ones!

Now due to my very strict religious upbringing I may have been a bit of an 'odd one out' but obviously... I was nowhere near 'the odd one out' that Jesus must have been as a young boy in Nazareth.

Imagine being alongside someone who never cheated in exams, never got moody and upset if they lost a game, was never jealous of what other people owned and never lied, told tales or disobeyed those over him. Imagine being alongside someone who just loved everyone, even those who were nasty to him.

But Luke 2 tells us that the sinless boy Jesus still was popular and grew in favour with both God and those around Him.

After Jesus left his home town Nazareth at about the age of 30 he got baptised by John, spent 40 days with the devil in the wilderness, turned water into wine, healed a few people and collected some disciples.

Then in Luke 4 we read that Jesus decided to return back to His childhood town, without his newly formed disciples it seems, and no doubt as he did so, all sorts of memories would have flooded back.

But this was not a social visit, Jesus returned to teach in His local Synagogue.

He read from Isaiah and announced that his ministry was to fulfil the vision of liberation as described by the prophet.

In other words after a very short time the man who left as a carpenter's son has now returned as the Messiah. At that point those listening completely lost it! They muscled Jesus out of the town and tried to throw Him over a cliff... but failed. It's ironic isn't it that the town where Jesus family and lifelong friends lived, was the first town that wanted to see him dead.

About a year and a half later in Mark 6, we read that Jesus decided to return again to His home town but this time with his disciples. I think a family reunion was not part of His plans, seeing that just a little while earlier his family had considered Him to be 'out of his mind.'

Our gospel reading shows us that Jesus is always willing to give people a second chance. He does not write people off forever even if once they had rejected Him.

But sadly his second visit met a similar response. Those in the Synagogue can't deny that Jesus spoke with great wisdom, but they had great problems believing that their local boy was the person who he said he was. Familiarity had bred contempt.

You can imagine them saying *'we recognise Him, He's Mary's boy, we know His brothers and sisters! He only left His home and His business a very short while ago.*

*What right has this local carpenter's son got to return to us making these outrageous claims.*

One commentator points out that their wondering *'how Jesus could be a prophet and the son of Mary'* was in itself a derogatory comment since a man was not described as His mother's son in Jewish usage, even if she was a widow except by insult.

Their insults also suggest that some had not forgotten His unusual birth. Was the 'Nazareth gossip' still considering that Jesus was born illegitimately?

Although his listeners were offended, there is no suggestion of violence this time. Probably because the dozen men accompanying Jesus included some pretty tough looking fishermen.

But then comes the saddest bit of the story.

Jesus, who had calmed the sea, raised the dead, cast out a legion of demons and performed many more incredible things found he was limited in power in his own hometown, because of the unbelief of the people. This proved to be Jesus final visit to Nazareth.

Even today it's so sad that some people fail to experience the power and miraculous works of Jesus because of their own unbelief.

It seems that sometimes God's incredible works of power are only going to be performed in an environment of faith.

*Hebrews 11 reminds us that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

Or put in another way by St Augustine:

*Faith is to believe what you do not see*

*The reward of this faith... is to see what you believe.*

I pray God will help our faith to grow stronger each day

I pray as our faith grows stronger that we will see more and more of our prayers answered.

I pray that the UK never becomes the new Nazareth, the place where Jesus can do little because of our unbelief.