Sermon on Mark 6:1-13 Stowe 7/7/24

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus returns to the town of Nazareth where he grew up, and He returns with his disciples with him. He is now seen to be a travelling Rabbi or teacher, although we know He is so much more. And when He gets to Nazareth He takes the disciples to the synagogue to teach.

But the people of Nazareth, who had seen him grow up and who knew His family, His mother and brothers, did not receive Him kindly.

They say *is this not a carpenter* – they judge Him for having been a tradesman, for being working class, and sadly they looked down on Him. But we know how amazing it was that God’s son was born not into a life of wealth and privilege, but into a poor and ordinary family. Jesus then and now identifies with the ordinary, the working class. He was – and is – one of us, He loves everyone and offers salvation to everyone.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus was *amazed* by the Nazareens *unwillingness to believe*. Such a sad expression. They had closed their hearts and minds to Jesus, and so missed out on the amazing things that Jesus said and did. The Nazareens did not give themselves the chance to learn that Jesus was their long awaited Messiah. They did not have ears to hear his amazing lessons of love. It makes me think of the expression familiarity breeds contempt.

It may sound harsh but I wonder if that can be said of some in our western society today: they know the nativity story, they know that Jesus died at Easter and have heard that Christians believe in eternity in heaven, but do they open their hearts and minds to really listen and learn the incredible truths behind these images? Are they too unwilling to believe?

Being truly open minded is a wonderful gift and a wonderful opportunity too for then the Holy Spirit can enter our hearts and reveal the glory of God..

I wonder if as well as dismissing Jesus as ‘a carpenter’ the people of Nazareth did not want to listen to Him because of the nature of the teaching Jesus was giving……

Because next Jesus sends His disciples out to herald or proclaim His teaching, and we learn exactly what His message was. Perhaps this message was too challenging for them to want to listen to it.

 Firstly, when Jesus sends out His disciples He tells them that they were not to take money with them but rely on the hospitality of strangers. And the disciples were not sent out to preach their own thoughts and ideas, but to herald or proclaim the teachings of Jesus. The disciples were Jesus’ messengers. God’s messengers with His message.

The message they were to proclaim is God’s call to repentance. This is Jesus message then, and now. And its not always an easy message to hear, for it implies that we are not perfect, it implies criticism of some of our words or deeds, it implies that we need to change – and people don’t always like change!

To repent is to change. It is to realise what we have done wrong, that what we have done is against the will of God, and this realisation leads us to regret these things. It’s to be completely honest with ourselves perhaps. Repentance is also to apologise openly for what we have done, both to God and also, when appropriate, to the people we have wronged. And it is to try, to wholeheartedly try very hard, not to do it again.

Repentance brings a change of heart, which leads to action. For when we acknowledge our sin then we are admitting that we need God’s help and this leads us to open our hearts to God’s forgiveness and to listen and try to live God’s way.

 It’s a big change that only happens if we humble ourselves and are honest about our imperfections, and open our hearts and minds to God. And God may want us to change some of our ideas, to change some habits that we might hold on to dearly or that we have done for a long time, so change like this may not be easy BUT (and it’s a brilliant but) living our lives God’s way, blessed by His forgiveness and guided by the Holy Spirit leads to living our life that God intended for us, to joy, to the security of being loved by God, and to peace. It is a message worth hearing and acting upon today, a message that our world is in desperate need of, and we the church are Jesus’ messengers now.