

Sermon: St Andrew, Corbridge Trinity 7 2024 Proper 9 Year B

Mark 6. 1-6

May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

Last Sunday, Linda reflected on the faith of two people who desired healing – the woman with the haemorrhage and Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, whose little daughter was grievously sick. Both of them had faith that Jesus could help them.

This morning I'd like us to think about faith. When we lived in Durham, I used to use a drive-through car wash at Tesco's. It was a tramulator – you drove onto it, switched the engine off, put the gears into neutral, released the handbrake and off it went. But ahead of you was what looked like a huge metal wall with huge red capital letters saying DO NOT BRAKE. And you went closer and closer to this wall, and every instinct in your head was screaming 'Brake'. Just when you thought it was curtains, the metal wall started inching up, just missing the front of the car, then traveling towards you across the bonnet, and right in front of the windscreen, with millimetres to spare. It was of course, the dryer. And I thought, using this car wash is a real act of faith. I was always very pleased to come out the other side.

And in this example, it's all about trust – trust in technology and engineering, and it's about loss of control – once you went on the tramulator, there was no turning back.

The woman and Jairus trusted that Jesus could heal. But they had to give themselves over to Jesus. Remember Jairus was told his daughter had died – it seemed too late. Jairus could have taken control and dismissed Jesus, but he didn't. Even when they arrived at the house, we're told everyone laughed Jesus to scorn when he said the child was not dead but sleeping. Jairus had to let Jesus be Jesus.

Becoming a committed Christian requires trust – in some of our Creeds we say 'I believe and *trust* in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. We trust in God as loving and just and true and unfailingly faithful. But it also means a kind of giving over of control – as God nor self becomes our centre. We try to do what God desires not what simply what suits us. There is no such thing as convenience Christianity.

Today's Gospel paints the opposite picture. Jesus returns to his home town of Nazareth for the first time since he began his public ministry. No doubt people had heard stories about his teaching and miracles. He was invited to give the sermon at the local synagogue. And we are told people were astounded, amazed by what he said. Many of them would have known him as a child, a teenager, a young adult. But they are astonished now to hear him teaching – Where did he get all this? What kind of wisdom is this that comes from his mouth? What are all these stories about his deeds of power? But the amazement seemed to have turned to resentment. We know him, he used to be the local carpenter; he fixed our table. It's Mary's kid. We know his brothers, James, Joses, Judas, Simon – they're normal, not to mention his sisters. And we are told they were offended at this 'smart Alec' – in fact, the Greek word for offended is *scandalised* in English. They were *scandalised* by him. One thing is sure, *Local hero?* I don't think so.

So, Jesus quotes an existing proverb – 'Prophets are not without honour except in their own town and among their own kin, and in their own house'. That last phrase is poignant; Mark has already told us that Jesus' own family tried to restrain him because people were saying 'He has gone out of his mind'. He's mad, he's off his trolley. And Mark adds a remarkable comment – 'He could do no deeds of power there', and that 'he was amazed at their unbelief', at their lack of faith. Although, Mark also says that he did lay his hands on a few sick people and healed – there would be some in Nazareth who would believe, and Jesus in his loving compassion, healed them.

So, last week, we heard of two people exercising faith. Today, we hear of the people of Nazareth who were faithless – and who opposed Jesus. Last week, there was healing; this week, 'he could do no deeds of power there because of their unbelief'.

The first thing I want us to notice is that Jesus was not some kind of magic-worker, dishing out healing like giving out Smarties. He was a *relational* healer. When people come to him in need and trust, he responds to them. When relationships become cynical and oppositional then there is no context for Jesus to reveal the Kingdom.

The second thing I want to say, is that it's never about *quantity* of faith. There are some Christians who seem to suggest that if only we can summon up enough faith then Jesus will heal. We often call them 'faith healers' and they tend to be flamboyant, emotionally-charged preachers, who whip people up into a kind of

frenzy. Most of them are sham and they cause untold pastoral damage as needy people are left feeling inadequate or guilty because they don't have enough faith. Never think like that. Bring what faith you have to Jesus.

But the third thing I want to say, is that faith does need to be *exercised*. You see, faith is a gift from God. St Paul even suggests that some people can be given a special gift of faith, just as some are given other spiritual gifts, of wisdom or ability to teach or encourage. But for all of us, when we, individually and corporately *exercise* faith – trusting in Jesus, and giving ourselves to him, then faith actually grows and my experience is, things happen, and we know God is with us, that he is the living God.

Of course, Jesus' healing miracles was to demonstrate that in the Kingdom of God, sickness, suffering, tears, death will be no more. He shows in time, the realities of eternity. That's why we understand healing as seeking wholeness, seeking *shalom* – peace, seeking a deep awareness of God's great love us. It's a more profound thing than simply cure; we experience on earth something of the wholeness of the coming Kingdom.

In the Tesco Car wash, I had to trust the giant red Letters 'DO NOT BRAKE'. I had to trust the technology. In my experience as a Christian before God, so often my head says 'Brake', and I slam the brake on, and the Lord can do no mighty work in me. Being a Christian is learning to trust Jesus, and to let Jesus be Jesus. And when I do, I come out the other side, bright and shining. Yes, the car may be a getting a bit old with rust and bits dropping off, but it looks, for a moment, as good as new.