



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 4 July 2021

Pentecost 6

Today we hear of a time when Jesus went back home. He taught his former neighbours about the love of God, and healed their sicknesses. Instead of welcoming him and receiving these blessings, the people rejected him. Let us not reject him today, but turn to him in worship.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"He was amazed at their unbelief." Mark 6:6

An Illustration to set the scene

Oscar Wilde's story *"The Nightingale and the Rose"* tells of a student who falls for a beautiful girl.

She says she will dance with him if he gives her a red rose.

This is a challenge, for there are no red roses to be found.

The only one who understands the student's pain is the nightingale, who also knows the true value of love.

She sings all night and presses her breast against a thorn. Her blood stains the petals red.

Of course, it costs her life.

In the morning, the student picks the red rose, not knowing its origin, and takes it to the girl.

However, by now she has forgotten him.

She rejects both him and the rose.

In anger and hurt, he throws the rose into the gutter and the wheels of a cart roll over it.

Anger, hurt, self-pity – these are natural responses to rejection.

Most of us have some experience of them.

Jesus too knew so much rejection, and it ultimately led him to the cross.

Today's Gospel tells of one of his earliest experiences of rejection by people who could have known better, for they are his family and childhood neighbours.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Until now, people have been amazed and delighted by Jesus. He has been teaching, healing, casting out demons and even raising a girl from death.

Mark makes it sound exhausting and we sense Jesus' relief at arriving in his home town after so much activity.

That relief is short-lived.

When he teaches in the synagogue, his words ring true and people are amazed. Then, as if something changes in the air, their amazement becomes suspicion.

How does Jesus know the things he is telling them?

They cannot equate who they think they know him to be – Mary's son, the carpenter – with who they see him to be as he speaks with such authority.

They take offence – literally the words say they “stumbled” over him. It is all too much for them, and what could have led to worship, leads instead to rejection.

The passage began with the people's amazement at what they see, but ends with Jesus' amazement at what he sees – their unbelief.

And we see how their unbelief begins to colour everything, and to limit the effect of Jesus' work among them.

One may wonder how the “few sick people” who were healed, told their story of what happened.

And what does Jesus do? He doesn't argue with them.

He recognises that this is just how it is – prophets are not without honour – except in their home town, except among their own kin, except in their own house.

If only we could hear his tone of voice – did he smile grimly? Did he laugh? Was he upset?

It is hard to tell.

But we might assume that Jesus, being human, certainly felt the pain of this early rejection.

And yet it didn't stop him from continuing to bring love and healing wherever he went.

He did not take his sense of identity and purpose from the people, but from his Father. He knew who he was and what he had to do.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

We too can reflect on the impact of unbelief and suspicion within a community.

Nothing can stop God working – but unbelief does have a dampening effect, on us and on those around us.

Our expectations can be so low. We cannot make ourselves believe, and of course our life experience can sometimes make belief seem impossible.

Like the lovelorn student in my opening illustration we can just give up trying.

But whether we believe or not, God goes on being God.

The rose that was thrown in the gutter was in fact a symbol of a greater love than that student could ever have imagined.

The relatives who turned away from Jesus missed seeing miracle after miracle.

If God is in our midst – and God is – then the unstoppable power of love is here.

Let us lift up our faces from our personal disappointments and our lack of faith, and turn again to the hope to which God calls us.

Let us dare to trust that God is at work in us, bringing to perfection all that God has begun.

“He was amazed at their unbelief.” Mark 6:6

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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