



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-July 4th 2021

Readings: Ezekiel 2: 2-5, Psalm 122, 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10,

Mark 6: 1-6

Many years ago, when I was newly ordained as a curate in the Church of England, I went to the old school Reunion Dinner in Cambridge. And I decided to eschew the luxury of a DJ and wear my clericals. As one of the last to enter the dining hall, I made my way to the seat beside my old history master, a lovely man called Colin Prince. Next to Colin was Bert Seaborn, art master, cricketer, loud, flamboyant and great fun. Bert used to throw me out of art class for being so bad at it that he thought I was being deliberately awful. (Another favourite of his was to check the catching ability of anyone who annoyed him. The test flying object might vary between a board rubber or, in extremis, a chair.) Bert and I had got on fine once we did not have to meet in the art room and I was old enough to have a beer with him after a match. However, it was ten years since we last met. As I approached my seat, Bert's voice rose to an outraged crescendo above the hubbub of old friends re-uniting.

'How dare you! I am not a religious man but that is offensive. How dare you come here dressed as a priest and taking the mick.' (I translate Bert's outburst and delete the expletives for the sake of delicate sensitivities.) As Bert raged on, the hall went quiet, and Colin Prince continued tugging at

Bert's sleeve. Slowly, Bert got the message and subsided. 'Dear God, you mean this man really is a priest?'

Once the facts were established we had a great dinner and catch-up. Bert, of course, was quite right. I was the last person you might reasonably have expected to end up in the sacred ministry.

Quite irrationally, I always think of Bert's defence of the Faith, when I read today's Gospel account. There is a difference, of course, between Jesus and me. But I always love the reaction to His return to His hometown.

The locals are stunned. 'Where does He get all this from?'

'Who does He think He is?' 'He's the local 'chippie', for goodness sake.'

'We know His mum and the family.'

'For crying out loud, He's from the local council estate.'

Their expectations are low. Their faith is hobbled by prejudice.

Consequently, there is only a small number of healings. The doubt and disbelief become a self-fulfilling prophecy. They cannot accept that someone from their hometown could have become this national figure.

What a contrast to last week's gospel account where the long-suffering woman with the haemorrhage is healed by touching the hem of The Lord's garment – in faith. Where the little daughter of the vicarage (synagogue leader – Jairus) is resurrected from death by the power of faith.

No faith- no result. The capacity to receive is limited by this lack, this doubt, this cynicism, this strange judgementalism, this closed mind and heart, this failure to be able to accept and acknowledge the power of God manifesting outside our expectations and pre-conditions.

Even more depressing (and spiritually disastrous) is the dismissive attitude. Because they cannot accept that the 'hometown boy' is big. They

seem to inadvertently agree with Nathanael who greets the news of a Messiah from Nazareth with the unforgettable put-down, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'

They remind me, in their low opinion of their town and people of that famous line from Marx(Groucho, of course) who opined,

'I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member!'

Not only does the Nazarene attitude deprive themselves of the radical healing power of God by indulging in faithless futility. But it also hinders the soul in other ways. When they look at Jesus, they see a Son of Man - and so He is. They do not see the Son of God. Thus, their missionary impulse is disarmed. When we look at a fellow human being, as Christians, we do so with the eyes of Christ. We see a Son of Man who has, in Christ His exemplar, the potential to become a Son of God. In short, the Nazarenes deprive themselves of the highest doctrine of God's love and the highest doctrine of the destiny of Man. Because Christ Jesus is, from all eternity, God so, in taking, by choice, His place in time and in humanity, He makes all things possible to those who have faith.

Of those without this faith and vision there is little to report except a spiritual impotence, a reductionist philosophy and an eternal prospect that ranges from dull to dire. Those who 'despise' and 'reject' Jesus miss the glory.

The true missionary – that is every Christian – does not just see Fallen Man but rather the astonishing potential of that same man to be a Second Adam, both a child of Man and a child of God.

As pilgrims and missionaries, we need to be Bethlehem shepherds helpless to do anything but to talk of the divine encounter - not Nazareth deniers who are too busy judging to look at the evidence.

When we welcome Jesus into the hometown of our hearts, it should be with excitement and expectation, love and longing and a faithfulness that

invites His transformative power into our lives and the lives of all who surround us and all with whom we have to do.