

Sermon – Trinity 5, Sunday 4 July 2021 Family Service

Mark 6:1-13



Wimbledon returned this week, together with the almost compulsory accompanying British rain showers!

When I watched the highlights of Andy Murray's match, I was struck by the level of home crowd support, with one commentator remarking '*even the person who created the AstraZeneca vaccine didn't get that much of an ovation!*'. It's hard to underestimate how much the support of the home crowd galvanises players in their game, and spurs them on to great things. But what if the home crowd were to do the opposite, and reject the local star? That is exactly what happens in today's reading from Mark's Gospel. Jesus has returned to his home town of Nazareth, where he is invited to speak at the local synagogue. Mark records for us that those at the synagogue that day were amazed at his teaching, and marvelled at the wisdom given to him (Mark 1:2). Yet some remarked '*Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son?*' (Mark

1:3). They took offence at him and, according to Luke's Gospel, subsequently drove him out of the village (Luke 4:29).

As many of you know, we've been working on the garden at the Vicarage, which was a bit of blank canvas when we moved in last year – basically a stretch of mud and earth. On our days off, we've been busy raking up the stones and trying to create a grassy area with a border for flowers and shrubs. Now any child will say that when you move a bigger rock in your garden, you often see creepy-crawlies scurrying away from the light. Somethings don't like being exposed to the light. It often takes the light of truth to reveal an injustice – we can think of many cases where investigative journalism for example has put shady behaviour under the spotlight, whether that is the behaviour of politicians, police, clergy or even other journalists! The Bible gives us an insight into human nature in saying that '*all have fallen short*'; in the light of our own self-reflection we know there are things we've said and done that had hurt others. However unlike investigative journalism which tends to identify a target for public blame, whilst the light of Christ exposes these things, it also looks to personally redeem and make good. When Peter met Jesus on the shores of lake Galilee after the miraculous catch of fish, he was overwhelmed by the generosity of God's goodness and fell to his knees and cried, '*leave me Lord, I'm full of sin!*'. Jesus response was not to rebuke or judge but instead to say '*Simon, don't be afraid, follow me*'. He had work for Peter to do, and Peter left all he had and followed Jesus (Luke 5:8-10).



The Old Testament book of Psalms contains this odd little prophecy *'The stone that the builders rejected will become the capstone'* (Psalm 118:22).

Written hundreds of years before the time of Christ, it foretells how the Messiah will be rejected by many – the stone the builders rejected - but to others will become like a capstone, the key supporting stone at the very top of the arch without which the whole wall would crumble. The townspeople of Nazareth rejected Jesus because they couldn't see past his humanity, couldn't contemplate that God could take the form of a man and experience the sufferings and pressures of human life, and so they reject him. To others however this made perfect sense of it all, that if God truly loved them and cared about them, he would be a God who walked with us, talked with us, cared for our sorrows and was familiar with human frailty and suffering. To them he would become their capstone. It also says in our Gospel reading today the disciples should *'shake the dust of their feet'*. Pious Jews in the time of Jesus would do this after travelling through a gentile area as a demonstration of how separate they were from unfaithful gentile practices. This sounds a little harsh but I think what it is saying is our responsibility ends if we have truthfully represented the Gospel; we need to move on as Jesus did and not let it stop us from

telling others who may be ready to hear. To be clear, it's not God rejecting people, it's people making their choice to reject God. I have a final picture that helps illustrate this.



'The light of the world' by pre-Raphaelite artist, William Holman-Hunt. A life-size version from 1854 now hangs in St Paul's Cathedral, London.

What do you notice when you study this picture?

Perhaps the overgrown door which suggests yet to be opened
Perhaps the rusty hinges suggesting not opened frequently
It's unclear the length of time Jesus has stood knocking
There's no door handle – which was pointed out to the artist!
WHY?
It had not been forgotten. The door cannot be opened from outside, it can only be opened from the inside.