

Holy Trinity Brussels
10.30 July 5th 2009
'A Prophet without Honour'
Ezekiel 2:1-5, Psalm 123, 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

Have you ever felt that the people around you do not really listen to you?
Or that the people in your situation just don't understand you?
Or that the people close to you don't really value what you have to say?

Do you ever feel that you don't quite fit in – or that you are in the way some how?

Well -You are not alone. There are quite a few heads nodding. Many of us feel this way.

Sometimes you may also find yourself having a 'junior' moment – when you feel that life is just not fair. 'It's just not fair'. Or may be you have the occasional Victor Medrew moment 'I just don't believe it'.

Why do other people get all the easy jobs? Why do I always get the difficult option?
'Why can't I be loved and valued all the time?' 'Its not fair'.

Well our readings this morning might just have something to say to you? The first thing that they have to tell us is that we are not alone.

Ezekiel found himself amongst people who were obstinate and did not listen.
The Psalmist suffered from ridicule and contempt.

And in 2 Corinthians Paul tells that he suffered with his thorn in the flesh – he just wanted to be rid of it. Three times he was reminded by God 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'. He goes on in verse 10 'That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong'.

But that's not what I want to hear. I don't want people to insult and persecute me so that when I am weak, God can make me strong.

A funny story. There was once a visiting preacher in a church just like Holy Trinity. After the service he stood at the door to shake hands. Everyone thanked him for his 'wonderful sermon', 'It was really helpful'. 'Very powerful' 'Very challenging'. The visiting speaker was really pleased. But then one man came up and 'Oh it was too long'. And then he kept rejoining the queue....and each time he said something very negative. 'Didn't understand a word', 'I was really bored' 'Worst sermon I've ever heard'.

'Who is that man?' asked the visiting speaker. 'Oh don't worry about him', said the Churchwardens. 'He's not very bright, he spends all his time repeating what he hears other people say'.

I just want people to be nice to me, to say nice things and to think nice things....and yet how would I know the truth, how would I grow? How would I be spurred on to make a difference in the world? C.S. Lewis once said that pain is God's megaphone. Sometimes I am more able to hear God's voice through the hard things than I am through the easier things.

In our gospel reading this morning Mark 6 verse 1, we find Jesus in his home town accompanied by his disciples. Verse 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed’.

No it can't be real... Isn't this Mary and Joseph's son, he's only a carpenter – miracles? Miracles? And where did he get that wisdom from? Who does he think he is?

Sometimes those who are close to us are just too close. Sometimes they are so close that they cannot see the flaws and weaknesses that others can see.

Sometimes they are so close that they cannot see beyond the flaws and weakness that they know so well and they cannot see the possibilities that God can see or even the miracles that God might want to do.

When we first moved to Sheffield and belonged to a small village church, one of our really good friends there felt called to be ordained. I thought that he was a good guy, I really liked him. He was great fun, very creative, spontaneous and able to relate to all sorts of people. I hesitated to support him as an ordination candidate. I just could not see how someone who was so much fun, and so spontaneous and creative could fit in the Church of England.

Just two weeks ago I heard that he was running a church in the south of England. The congregation has doubled since he was appointed. He has set up an arts/IT centre in the community, and he organises the worship for Diocesan events. How wrong I was!

Mark 6 verse 4f. Jesus said to them, ‘Only in his home town, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honour. He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

I was part of my friend's home town...and I was getting in the way of the miracles that he had inside of him. In his home town we could not recognise God's call.

As ever the Diocese in Europe has needed to develop its own way of doing things. But in England, the Church of England does not normally allow clergy to serve in their home or sponsoring parishes. There have been occasions that it has ignored its own best practice and things have gone horribly wrong.

Congregations usually need to allow the wider Church to discern an individual's calling to ordained ministry. When the representatives of wider Church have discerned – then it is role of the wider Church to train and then deploy individuals in new situations where there are no obstacles to the ministry of that person being recognised and valued.

I sometimes worry that the Church is makes too much of the difference between clergy and laity as though the ministry of the clergy is all important. I also worry when we talk about our evening service at being ‘lay led’ because that excludes me and also Gillian. I am much happier with the more Methodist concept of the ‘ministry belonging to the whole people of God’. Ministry belongs to the whole Church – the whole people of God. To everyone.

One of the distinctives of ordained ministry is that the ministries of bishops, priests and deacons have been discerned, confirmed and authorised by representatives of the wider church for service across the whole church, whereas the very rich variety of lay ministries is more normally discerned, confirmed and authorised within a congregation for service locally.

When I was coming to the end of my theological training my then Bishop, the Bishop of Winchester wanted to send me to serve as a curate in a parish called Sholing in Southampton. I declined his invitation immediately. I did not even contact the Vicar for an informal conversation. I have numerous Aunts and Uncles, Great Aunts and Great Uncles, Cousins and Second Cousins – all living in the parish of Sholing. I could just imagine the grief my Grandmother would have given me about the weddings of my cousins and the baptisms of her great grandchildren.

Jesus said to them, ‘Only in his home town, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honour.

Mark 6:6 The Jesus went round teaching from village to village. Calling the twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

They were to travel lightly.

Verse 11: If any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust of your feet when you leave...

Verse 12 They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

The disciples went from village to village – all away from their home towns – and it is clear that they felt free to serve as God had called them and that their ministries were very fruitful – changing peoples lives dramatically. Where they were not welcomed they were to shake the dust off their feet and to go else where.

In our deepest places we all long to be valued, to be loved, to be heard and to contribute to the well-being of the world in which God has placed us. We want to make a difference. But sometimes we can feel not understood, or listened to or valued.

Some of you may feel that your families just do not understand your life, or your job or your values. The harder you try to explain - the less that they seem to understand. Its clear from this account and others that Jesus family just did not understand what he was about. This is confirmed by the conversation between Mary and Jesus at the wedding in Canaan.

I sometimes wonder what it must be like when President Barroso goes home to Portugal. Does his mother tell him that he’s looking a bit tired.....does he really need to be so busy....all those meetings and rushing around Europe....all that foreign food can’t be good for you...What you need is some good Portuguese home-cooking.

Maybe explaining what we do at work to our families...is less important.... than being the children of our parents, a brother or sister to our siblings, or nieces and nephews to our aunts and uncles.... Just giving ourselves to nurturing our family relationships is really important. And if that means forgetting that you are the President of the European Commission and remembering the family stories of your childhood maybe that is the best thing to do?

At work some of us may feel that the new things others say are listened to, whilst what we say is ignored. Maybe the moment has come to find a new ways of saying things or even for finding a new role or even a new job.

Maybe within Church you feel that you are not listened to in your current group or role, maybe the time has come to explore joining a new group or taking up a new role where your voice is fresh and where you might have new things to say.

Some churches have lots of able people with similar gifts - Too many for them to be used within a single congregation. They encourage and enable their members to help other churches grow. In Bath and Wells diocese we had a number of 'Faith-Sharing' teams made up of people from churches across the diocese. All of them found that when they visited a new Church they had fresh things, often challenging things, to say and were listened to with care. Not surprisingly when they returned to their home churches they all had fresh stories to tell and were heard with fresh ears. Faith was shared and the Churches across the diocese encouraged and built up.

This week as you think about the different areas of your life, give thanks to God for the places and people that listen to you and value you and your contributions.

And in those situations where you don't feel heard or valued ask God to help you change or to help you change the situation.

AMEN