

## Readings for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

4<sup>th</sup> July 2021

### First Reading: 2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

### Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

### Gospel: St Mark 6:1-13

Jesus came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and

proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

### **A Reflection for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

The importance that Jesus places on welcoming the stranger, is central to his teaching and key to our gospel reading today. The remarkable thing is Jesus teaches his followers the importance of welcoming the stranger in the face of the insults, hostility and rejection that he is on the receiving end from his own people in his home town of Nazareth. It is in the face of deeply ingrained prejudice that he sends his followers out into the world to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom.

Mark tells us that Jesus has travelled away from his native town of Nazareth proclaiming the coming of God's Kingdom. He preaches in synagogues and he tells stories to the people through parables that give them a glimpse of what the kingdom of God is like, and he proclaims God's kingdom by his actions of healing the sick and by casting out demons. Outside his native home his fame spreads. People from all over Israel come to witness for themselves Jesus's healing miracles. He was considered to be a teacher, prophet and a miracle worker of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

And now Jesus returns to his own town, Nazareth where he is invited to preach in the synagogue.

Mark doesn't record the words that Jesus spoke, but he says that many of those who heard him were amazed.

What Mark does tell us is that the response to Jesus's word was very hostile.

Those who hear him ask 'where did this man get these things', and they ask, 'what's this wisdom that has been given to him that he even works miracles?'

Isn't this the carpenter they ask? And they ask it in a disparaging way. The word they use for carpenter is *tekton* which is translated as carpenter but means anyone who works with their hands; they are implying that Jesus isn't a skilled carpenter. They are asking, 'is Jesus not just a common worker who works with his hands like the rest of us?'

How can an ordinary construction worker be a prophet of the Kingdom of God?

The insults continue when they ask. 'Is not this Mary's son?' This sounds innocent enough; but by not referring to Jesus by referencing his father, Joseph, they are casting aspersions on his legitimacy. Like here in Scotland, a man was identified by his father's lineage, in the way that the prefix Mac in surnames like Mackenzie mean 'the son of'.

Referring to Jesus as the son of Mary, was to imply that he was illegitimate. I wonder if this slur on Jesus was made because people were asking whether this man Jesus was indeed the son of God, so what better way to counter these rumours than to suggest he didn't even know who his biological father was, yet alone his heavenly Father.

Far from being a story of a returning hero or of a local boy made good, this episode tells us something of the inherent and unconscious prejudices that often lie beneath the surface of society, especially where that society is traditionally hierarchical. How can a lowly carpenter be transformed into a teacher, a prophet, and a miracle worker? Was Jesus considered to be someone with ideas above his station who therefore needed taking down a peg or two?

By attacking Jesus personally, they undermine all that he does to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom.

Unfortunately, this is something we are well aware of today, the tactic of undermining what someone has to say by attacking them personally.

Sometimes we have to put aside our own deeply ingrained prejudices before we can actually hear what someone has to say. I say this because I, like most other people, have prejudices even if I don't acknowledge them publicly.

The colour of a person's skin, their religion, their social status, their sexual orientation, their accent, the way they dress, their physical or mental disabilities, their body piercings, their tattoos; these are all things that can affect how we judge a person and can influence whether or not we take seriously what a person has to offer.

How long do you think it takes for someone to make their first impression on us? One minute, 30 seconds or 10 seconds? Research by Princeton University suggest that we make our judgement about a person within the first one tenth of a second of meeting them for the first time.

The rejection and hostility of people in Jesus's hometown, affected his ability to exercise his healing ministry. It's interesting that in many of his healing miracles, Jesus tells the person who has been healed that, 'your faith has healed you'. Clearly, belief in Jesus was important to the healing outcome, but in his hometown, Jesus is rejected, there was little belief or trust in him.

It is in this atmosphere of rejection and hostility that Jesus sends his disciples out into the countryside to take his proclamation of God's kingdom by acts of healing.

The disciples are no longer followers and observers but speakers and doers.

What I find really interesting about Jesus's commission to his disciples is that they are to take nothing for the journey but that they are to be totally dependent on the hospitality they receive. This is a life of radical faith. You are to do what God calls you to do today, and God, through others, will take care of you.

The towns and the people that the disciples are to visit are to be judged; not by their sinfulness or their moral uprightness, or even whether or not if they agree with what the disciples have to say. They will be judged by how they live by God's call to welcome the stranger into their midst.

In Jewish society a host's first duty was to see to the washing of the guests' feet. Jesus tells his disciples to shake the dust off their feet in the faces of those who fail to welcome them as guests. This is a symbolic gesture to convey that they have fallen short of God's call to welcome the stranger.

The call by God to welcome the stranger has not gone away. It applies to us today. Indeed, you could say that the call to welcome the stranger is what unites us as the body of Christ. Each one of us are uniquely loved by God but we are all different. We don't all share the same politics or the same outlook on life, in the same way as we don't share each other's tastes in music or films or what we watch on TV, or the football team we support. What does unite us is that despite our differences, we welcome each other as members of the body of Christ.

None of us are perfect, and indeed, it is not up to us to be perfect. It's up to us to be human and humane to one another.

We are each a mixture of saint and sinner, of struggle and victory, of lost and found, and it is in our diversity that the body of Christ finds its true strength. This is not a strength that we have because we agree with one another; it is a strength we have because of our humanity toward one another, and the warmth by which we welcome each other.

We take this welcome of the stranger outside of these walls into our communities and into our relationships with the rest of God's creation.

It is in welcoming the stranger that Christ still sends his disciples out to face down the unclean spirits of hate and of prejudice, of injustice, exploitation, and inhumanity, in whatever form they may appear.

Our Gospel passage ends today with a message of hope. In the face of the rejection and hostility, demons of hatred, prejudice and intolerance are driven out, barriers are broken down and there is healing and there is anointing to salve the brokenness in lives; to heal the brokenness in relationships, of brokenness in society and in the brokenness in our relationship with the rest of God's creation.