

TUESDAY COMMUNION

"Can a tradesman speak God's word?"

Hymn:

Reading: Luke 4.22-31

Prayers:

I knew a much-loved GP who I suspect some of you knew who, long after he'd retired, told me that when he first came to practice as a GP some people looked down on him.

His "fault" in their eyes was that he was practicing in the town where he'd grown up and his father had owned a very successful butcher's shop. In other words, his background was in "trade" rather than one of the professions, and this was held against him.

In Mark's Gospel the people turn against Jesus when they realise that Jesus was not only the son of the carpenter but the man who had made their tables and benches.

***"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary....?
And they took offence at him."***

In Luke's Gospel there is certainly a hint of this prejudice when they say, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

In the background is same sense of a man who comes from a background in "trade" as opposed to a man who had a father who was a religious professional: a scribe or a pharisee.

But for Luke the dominating offence that Jesus causes is his demand that people recognise that he speaks and acts in the name of God.

They want to see him "perform" his miracles in the same way we may go to the opera house to see a famous magician.

We don't put our faith in a magician and the people of Nazareth had no intention of putting their faith in this carpenter's son!

They were interested in the spectacular but they were no interested in what Jesus had just been saying:

- that God is present in the world to bring about change
- that he has a special concern for those
 - whose needs are greatest
- that he come to set us free
 - from all that prevents us having abundant life.

What seems to have really upset them is when Jesus reminds them that this quality of trust has often been found more in people of other nationalities than amongst the people of Israel.

- Elijah was helped by a gentile widow in his time of need and he, in turn, helped her when her son seemed to have died.
- Naaman, a general with the King of Syria was cured of his leprosy when he trusted the prophet, Samuel, and did what he told him.

This reading challenges us in two ways. First, in a general way it invites us to see the true worth and value in every person. I know in myself, how I can be prejudiced both in favour of someone and against someone by factors which should have no bearing on my judgement. In so far as we are able, we should judge people as God judges them: by their gifts and qualities irrespective of their race, wealth or background.

When someone speaks the question is not: does this person come from an aristocratic or humble background but is this person speaking to us words which reflect the truth about our world and the challenges that face us.

Indeed, is there something of the Kingdom of God in what this person is saying or not! If there is then we must take heed!

Secondly, the challenge of the Gospel is this: is Jesus a man through whose words and deeds the living God reveals himself? The people of Nazareth ultimately did not believe that that was so.

They were happy with Jesus the wonder worker, Jesus the speaker of fine words, but not with Jesus who reveals the nature of God and the way that God is at work in the world and how he wants to be at work in our own lives.

In our communion, we say "Yes"

- both to the God who is at work in our world through his Spirit, at work in many places and amongst many people
- and to the God who we believe we meet in Jesus and who invites us both to trust him and to share in his life.

Amen.