

Greetings! Our theme for this morning is the 'Varied reception given to God's messengers'. How do we respond when we hear the goodnews of the gospel? Jesus himself tells us through many parables that the responses of people to the gospel is varied. The parable of the sower and the seed and the different types of soil indicate the kind of responses that people usually make. But the key question in all this is. 'Who do we think Jesus is?' In the gospel reading from St. Mark this morning we notice again the response to Jesus and his ministry in his own home town of Nazareth.

Jesus leaves Capernaum and he comes back to Nazareth though Mark does not name it. Jesus is accompanied by his disciples. On the Sabbath Jesus attends the synagogue and is given the opportunity to expound the reading from the law and the prophets. The whole congregation is astonished by the wisdom that he exhibited and the way he taught with authority. The reason for their astonishment comes out in a series of five questions. Three of those questions relate to his ministry: 'Where did this man get these things? (The power and authority with which he taught). 'What's this wisdom that has been given him?' (The wisdom with which he spoke that had his audience glued to his teaching). 'What are these remarkable miracles that he is performing?' (The power with which he drove out demons and healed people). They were beginning to wonder about the source from which he had gained all this wisdom, knowledge and the power that he had exhibited elsewhere over demons and sickness.

The next two questions are about him as a person: 'Is this not the carpenter, Mary's son Jesus and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters here with us?' Jesus had not undergone any formal training and was known as a carpenter. Who then had empowered him to speak and act with authority? The rhetorical question, 'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James?' indicates that the villagers did not expect anything different from Jesus. In other words they thought he was just one of them, but all of a sudden he seems to be doing things differently. These questions point to his being a local son, a common, ordinary man with a trade and a family known to all. This common knowledge of who Jesus "really" was led the townspeople to reject the alternative that God might be using him in any special way.<sup>1</sup>The reference to Mary is probably because Joseph may have already died. The people find no reason to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus also did not perform too many miracles there because of the hardness of their hearts. Lane states that 'unbelief excluded the people of Nazareth from the dynamic disclosure of God's grace that others had experienced'.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus then says, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith. The key thing that we notice is that there was a lack of faith in spite of all the evidence that was placed before them. Sometimes we too can be like that. God continues to search us out through his message and his messengers. We may not hear the message or we may reject the message because of our lack of faith. God calls us this morning to believe in the message of his Son Jesus that the forgiveness of sins and life eternal are available to all those who believe in him. Our lives will be radically transformed when we allow the message of Jesus the Christ to sink into our hearts and minds. May God help us to respond in faith to the goodnews of the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Guelich, R. A. (1998). *Mark 1-8:26* (Vol. 34A, p. 310). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

<sup>2</sup> Lane, Mark, P. 204