

SERMON – Wednesday 3rd February 2016

Mark 6 v 1- 6

I wonder how often in life you have been truly amazed by something? Something said or done or seen. Perhaps a new invention and you are left (like me a technophobe) wondering however do they do that? Or perhaps by the birth of a perfectly formed baby (as we have enjoyed in our family this last month) or by an inspiring sun set for which Madeira is renowned. Times when you have been amazed by the ingenuity or perfection or beauty? I guess in the 21 century the now much over used word for amazement is awesome. That's awesome you often hear the young say. How often in life I wonder have you been left amazed or in awe?

The bible is full of 'amazing' and 'awesome' experiences. Every time a person was miraculously healed by Jesus from leprosy, or the blind given their sight or the lame to walk then amazement fell upon the healed and the bystander alike. And people were left with no answer as to how? Simply left to praise God with loud halleluiahs. Even the scribes and Pharisees people who felt seriously threatened by Jesus' words and actions also stood in silent amazement and awe and said 'how does he have such knowledge and wisdom'?

The only person throughout the gospels who did not appear to be amazed was Jesus himself. He was certainly not amazed by the power demonstrated by His Father he was not amazed

by the antics of the scribes and Pharisees, He was not even amazed how slow His disciples were to grasp His message. No there are only two occasions in the bible when Jesus was recorded as being amazed and our reading set for this morning was one of them.

Jesus said . ⁶ ***He was amazed at how many people had no faith [because of their unbelief].***

What was to amaze Him most was how was it that the people who knew him the most, who had grown up with him, were schooled and played with Him. Those who arguably were the most likely to trust and obey Him were so lacking in faith that He was unable to do miracles or find a harvest for His word?. How blinkered they were. How deaf of ear. Here in His own backyard Jesus could find no faith and so we are told He was left in amazement.

But I said there were two occasions in the bible when we have Jesus recorded as being amazed. The other can be found in Luke's gospel (7)- The story of the healing of the centurion's favoured servant. When the centurion believed Jesus could restore the servant's health from a distance with no necessity to be present. To this Jesus said:

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. He turned to the people following him and said, "I tell you, this is the most faith I have seen anywhere, even in Israel."

I am quoting from the ERV version of the bible. A number of other translations use the word 'marvelled' in place of

amazed but the sentiment are the same. Not anywhere amongst the Jews had he witnessed such faith and here was the centurion, a gentile, demonstrating immense faith in His power to heal and in God's promises.

The reading this morning sets us a question too. Will Jesus be amazed by the lack of faith demonstrated in our lives like that of the fellow residents of Nazareth or will He be amazed by the extent of our faith as in the case of the Centurion?

There are those who still demonstrate great faith in their lives. Over recent weeks I have read two books of people who have, or are still, demonstrating that faith .One is of a book written by John Wesley Kingston entitled 'These miracles did Jesus in Ireland'. It tells of his life between the wars when he gave up a comfortable post as pastor of an affluent church in Ireland to answer a calling to become an itinerant evangelist with no secure financial support. In the book he tells how he was in Cork in Ireland having stayed a few nights at a cheap lodgings which still needed to be paid for and his borrowed car parked outside devoid of petrol. He needed to fulfil a preaching engagement that evening in another town some miles away.

He wrote' *my funds were down to zero. I spent half a day in prayer. Lord, I said, I need £5 by 3pm. The clock struck 2pm. chimed the half hour and at five minutes to 3 a telegraph boy rang the bell. God had put into the heart of a man I had*

met only a fortnight before to telegraph the amount I was praying for. 'All things are possible to Him that believeth'

The other book is written by another John , John Kirkby the founder of CAP Christians against Poverty. John in worldly terms was a successful entrepreneur with a string of successful business behind him. He gave it all up in a step of faith to establish the charity designed to assist those struggling to overcome a life torn apart by debt. During the life of the charity he has faced what appeared to be insuperable difficulties always stepping out in faith beyond the finance he had to meet the needs of others. He wrote ***'if you looked with your eyes it all looked pretty grim. But I say that if you look in faith it looks great. As the word says it is impossible to please God without faith.*** And so the charity grows from strength to strength and now operates and is recognised world-wide.

If we compare our own life against such examples we may be left feeling somewhat inadequate in our own steps of faith. If so then let us take comfort. For, as we will be learning from our Lenten course here at Holy Trinity this year, that 'great faith' as demonstrated by the two John's in these testimonies is just one of the 'Spiritual gifts' given to man. The gift of divine enablement to act on God's promises with confidence and unwavering belief in God's ability Great faith to fulfil His promise and advance the cause of Christ. Great faith may not be your or my particular gifting as it was so obviously theirs.

But we are all asked at times to exercise faith in our lives, believing in an outcome that we cannot yet see and believing in the promises of Christ to deliver. To step out of the comfort zone like Peter did in stepping out of the boat to walk on water. To overcome what to man appears to be insuperable difficulties. As our Chaplain reminded us on Sunday faith is to submit to the love of God and to live a life where by God's will is allowed to exceed over our own, a will and a power able to do exceeding more than we can do in our own strength.

Faced with these testing times in our lives will we amaze Jesus by our faith or will we amaze Him by the lack of it?
Amen