

A sermon preached by Revd Eleanor Whalley at St Andrew's Church, Soham on the Sixth Sunday after Trinity 2018
2 Cor. 12: 2-10; Mark 6: 1-13

May I speak and may we hear in the name of the living God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

So Jesus says: 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their own home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house'.

I've spoken about prophets before, standing up here.

I showed you, you may remember, two pairs of glasses:

a pair for seeing close up,

and a pair for seeing long distance.

Glasses which remind us that a prophet has two roles:

The role of seeing and speaking the truth about the present –

the truth about things close up –

the truth about how things are –

And at the same time the role of seeing and speaking the truth about the big picture –

taking the long view –

prophesying about how things *will* be.

In today's Gospel,

the congregation at the synagogue only see close up –

they only see what they already know -

'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us'.

Jesus has grown up amongst these people – he's in his home town.

What the people of that town already know about him

blinds them to what else there is to know.

They can't see the wood for the trees.

They can't see long-distance. They can't see the big picture.

The translation I've just read from – the NRSV - says 'they took offence at him'

What the Greek says is 'they stumbled' –

They tripped up – they fell over - they literally stopped in their tracks.

They were prevented from moving – from seeing – further ahead.

Jesus we're told, is 'amazed at their unbelief'.

Belief - faith - relies on the ability to look beyond our immediate circumstances.

If we believe, we see more than that which is under our noses:

We see – we hope for – things yet to come.

‘Faith is the assurance of things hoped for – the conviction of things not seen’:

that’s how the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it.

People of faith don’t trip up on the reality of the present – they don’t get stuck along the way.

People of faith don’t stumble. Or at least not terminally.

When we do stumble

we pick ourselves up

and keep going:

we carry on; we focus on the goal.

The first Christians were known as followers of the Way –

They were recognised as people on the move,

people moving forwards,

people moving towards a goal that lay ahead of them –

albeit a goal that they could not yet see.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus has a double focus:

He sees close up, and he sees long-distance.

He ‘cures the sick’ –

he attends to the needs of those who are literally in front of him –

And he sends the disciples out.

He sends them off.

He sends them beyond the immediate.

And he tells them what to do

if they’re not made welcome - if their message isn’t received.

He doesn’t say sit down and talk about it.

He doesn’t say call a meeting with the people of that house to decide what to do.

He doesn’t even say stop and pray.

He says ‘as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet’.

In other words – don’t dwell on it - move on.

Thinking about that double focus, here's a hawk:

I have this hawk in my sitting room to remind me about what I'm going to say next.

Hawks have binocular vision.

A hawk can see detail – it can see close up -

it can pin-point a mouse from an extraordinary height.

And a hawk can take the long view.

The gaze of a hawk can take in a field.

A hawk can see a whole panorama.

In order to survive – in order to be what it's cut out to be; what it's made to be -

a hawk has to constantly change its focus.

A hawk has to switch from one type of vision to another.

I think that as the Church – the whole Church of God, 'Church' with a capital 'C' -

as disciples of Christ sent out into the world -

we are called to be like this hawk.

I think we're called to have binocular vision.

We are called to attend to what is in front of us –

called to respond to immediate need –

called to spot and to focus on the mice.

And we are also called

to see the whole field.

We're called to see the big picture,

and we're called to join with others –

not necessarily with other Christians –

join with people who share our vision.

We're called to help move things forward.

For me, that's what mission is about.

And mission, I would say

includes things that the Church has historically

been very poor at recognising as having to do with mission.

Some of you, I know, are tired of hearing me talk about those things, so I'm not going to speak about them now,

But you might like to think

about what they might be:

things the Church has sat light to or ignored, despite the changes and discoveries made in society more widely;

things which, because they have been ignored,

have damaged the face of the Church –

have caused the Church and its message to lose credibility.

Back to the hawk.

The reality is that no one individual:

no one Christian,

no one priest

can act like a hawk – can maintain that dual focus –

all on their own

all of the time.

Particular individuals,

particular situations,

particular parochial crises –

whether they be to do with buildings, people or money -

these particular things will sometimes make it seem

like the Church's focus, our focus, my focus

is exclusively one thing or another.

Maybe it seems like that focus is a person –

maybe it seems like it's a project –

maybe it seems like it's yet another edict

that's come down from the Diocesan Office.

If that's how things appear,

or if that's how things are,

then that is why we need one another.

That is why we are called to be Church: Church in this place, and Church throughout the world.

Even Christ needed 12 apostles –

he knew he couldn't do it alone.

We all have different gifts,
we all have different personalities,
we each have a different natural focus –
we're all naturally drawn to seeing close up or seeing long-distance -
but put all those differences together
and offer them to God,
and God will transform them
as he transform us - into his body, the Church.

God will make what we bring enough,
God will make what we are enough,
God will make us enough,
so long as we stay part of the body.

'Take no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Don't put on two tunics':

together – as God's Church - we have all we need.

Together Christ sends us into the world.

May he make us worthy to share in that mission.

Amen.