**St James Bolton – Sunday 4th July 2021**

**JESUS AND HIS FAMILY - Rev Gordon Dey**

**Readings: Ezek 2:1-5 and Mark 6:1-13**

Family Life…. what’s it like? Joys and sorrows…times of struggle, even separation sometimes when we need to ‘find ourselves’, and even ‘free ourselves’. Sometimes periods of reconnection and fresh commitment to each other.

Journeying through Mark in our lectionary this year – we can note the way Jesus experiences these things. Today we look at particular incident that occurs when he revisits Nazareth with his disciples in Mark 6, but we’ll try and put this in the context of the wider story.

Let’s recall the location of Nazareth – about 20 miles east of the Sea of Galilee, four miles south of the newly refurbished city of Sepphoris that Herod Antipas had originally made his capital to cover his control of Galilee. Later, in 20 AD, he recognised the need to build a brand new city that he called Tiberias, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. South of Nazareth is the Plain of Jezreel that separated the hills of Lower Galilee from Samaritan territory.

What do we know about Nazareth? It was a small, insignificant and lowly place, with no mention of it in the OT or in any contemporary writings; it was a denigrated place – the only description we have of it is Nathaniel’s response to Philip, ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth’; it was probably a recently established community – perhaps a place created for poor workers involved in the rebuilding of Sepphoris. Although Jesus’ ministry was centred on Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee he is pre-eminently known as ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ – a phrase that occurs 29 times in the NT – both in the Gospels, Acts and the writings of Paul. Nazareth was the place of his 30 year preparation for ministry.

Today Nazareth is a large bustling mostly Arab city – but we have pictures from 1900 that portray Nazareth as an insignificant hamlet, but still specially remembered by Christians as the home of Jesus where an early Byzantine church identified the place where Mary was visited by Gabriel. A large Basilica Church was erected in the 1960’s to protect this site, that is a place of extensive pilgrimage.

For Jesus, Nazareth was his home for 30 years, where he lived with this brothers and sisters, where he learnt the building trade from his father, where he went out to work, probably at Sepphoris; where he benefited from his mother’s spirituality, where he became convicted of his Father’s call to share the good news of the Kingdom of God.

 **Q: What was it important that Jesus was to be known as ‘Jesus of Nazareth’?**

Jesus story, and his ongoing link to Nazareth after his ministry was based in Capernaum and focused around the Sea of Galilee are portrayed in his two later visits to Nazareth and to the concerns of his family. All four bible passages indicate that they are ‘not on the same page’. He visits Nazareth on his own as his ministry begins; In Mark 3 we hear that his family are concerned about him, and later in the chapter we read they visit him in Capernaum. In Mark 6, our passage today, Jesus returns again to Nazareth and is similarly rejected. Let’s recall the background to this:

Mark 3. 21 “When his family heard about it they set out to take charge of him. ‘He is out of his mind’ they said”

Mark 3. 31 “Then his mother and his brothers arrived; they stayed outside and sent in a message asking him to come out to them. A crowd was sitting around him when the word was brought that his mother & brothers were outside asking for him. ‘Who are my mother and my brothers,’ he said. Looking round at those who were sitting in a circle about him he said, ‘Here are my mother & my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister & mother

It’s with that background that Jesus returns to Nazareth, perhaps just a few months later – and once again meets with his former neighbours and friends in the synagogue – their local community centre. We’re told that ‘they turned on him’ – and that their opposition becomes a barrier to his ministry there – just a few people healed!

What questions does this raise for us – perhaps the following:

 **Q: What is this wisdom that he has – it was their question and needs to be ours?**

 **Q: Why did they reject him – what does this tell us about human nature –
what can we learn from this?**

 **Q: Do we face similar rejection – is the church facing ‘rejection’ in our days.**

 **Q: How are we to deal with this – how is the church to deal with this.**

Finally – let’s recall and be glad how things change in the course of Jesus ministry. His mother is at the foot of the cross. Later, Mary and his brothers join the disciples in Jerusalem to await the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Later still James, one of those brothers becomes leader of the church in Jerusalem. Family harmony is restored!

**Weekly Notices**

***Save the date***

**11 July - ‘Wildly’ Worshipping**- join us for a service of sung worship, teaching, interactive prayers and a celebration of ‘family’ in the garden. Bring a chair or picnic rug if you are able and please invite friends to join us.

**24 July - Garden Party**- join us for cups of tea/coffee and cakes, crafts, and find out how we’re working to save the planet, right here in Bolton.

**25 July - Family Baptism** - join us as we welcome Esmai, Pearl and Edie (and their mum and dad of course).
If you have a message of encouragement or welcome for the girls, please let Sarah Gates know.

***Prayer Points***

*Frances has put those of us who were interested in prayer triplets in contact with each other and encouraged us to pray for each other, a wonderful first step.*

On the Prayer 24/7 website <https://www.24-7prayer.com/prayerforsmallgroups> there is a great resources section with lots of ideas for praying in small groups as a way to draw closer to God, both individually and as a community.

One lovely suggestion is to take it in turns to be prayed for, by the others in the group.  If meeting physically, to sit on a specific chair, (if meeting on zoom to focus on one person at a time), the rest of the group pray a prayer of blessing or encouragement over each person. A dedicated period of time to pray for each person in the group, or alternatively you could pray this way for one person, each time you meet. Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"

At the zoom prayer meeting, this Wednesday night, I shared a 2 minute 'Thy KIngdom Come' video which featured a Grandson talking about how his Grandfather prayed effectively and persistently for the needs of his family, friends and acquaintances. <https://fb.watch/6tDcgPHEDF/>

This Grandfather used a prayer diary/journal where he wrote down the needs of people, beside their names.

Keep a journal together: record prayer requests that you pray during your times together, and write down how God responds.  This is a simple, yet powerful way to remember the way God works. A tool to build faith and be encouraged as the Lord answers prayers. Colossians 4:2 "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful"

* *Sarah M*