

Isaiah 40:21-31

Mark 1: 29-39

Towards the beginning of his ministry, just after he has called Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him, we find Jesus in the town of Capernaum. On the Sabbath he enters the synagogue and teaches the people. We aren't told what he says, not in Mark's account, but we know, for Mark has already told us, that the burden of Jesus' message was that the Kingdom of God has come near, so turn around and believe the good news. He teaches and then he heals a possessed man, and because of this act, we are told that his fame began to spread.

However, unconscious of that burgeoning fame, we see that Jesus simply goes home to his friends' house, seeking only to spend time and probably to eat together with Peter and the small group of followers. But when they get there, there is no meal waiting, because Peter's wife's mother is sick with a fever. Was it a sickness that might lead to death? We're not told. But she wasn't well, and that was all that mattered to Jesus. The coming of the Kingdom of God means that what is not well, what is not right should be put to rights, and so Jesus sets out to put this thing right. He takes her by the hand and the fever leaves her. And so order is restored, and dinner is provided!

But then we see the effects of that incident in the synagogue. It is the Sabbath, and so people wait until the day of rest ends at sunset, and then they come, bringing others who are ill in body or mind. The Kingdom which Jesus has proclaimed means turning things around. It means turning around people's attitudes and actions, so that they no longer do wrong but live to please and glorify God. It means turning around the systems of the political world, so that justice and love, which are found only in God, are the principles which hold sway. And it means turning around people's suffering. So Jesus heals the people who are brought to him.

But it must have been an unnerving experience. This is the first time he sees how people are going to react to him. And so very early in the morning, maybe after a sleepless night, he gets up and goes off to pray. He gets up to go off and wait on the Lord, to renew his strength. He knows where wisdom is to be found, he knows who it is who does not grow weary or faint and whose understanding is unsearchable, and it is to Him, to God, that his Son turns. He turns there to get help and the help he gets is such that reminds him of the bigger picture. When we turn to God that is always what he will do for us: he will change or renew our perspective.

Lets think about perspective for a while. When people talk about "the world" I wonder what image comes into your mind? Maybe it's a wall-map of the world with all the countries put in in contrasting colours so that each one stands out. Maybe it's a globe, with the mountain ranges and deserts mapped in in detail. Maybe it is a picture of the earth taken from space. That's the one that I tend to see. The world - a little ball with a blue, green and white swirling pattern over it. Rather a pretty thing. It would look nice made of blown glass and hanging in a window. And yet, when I go out of my door into the big wide world, I don't see a small globe and there is no feeling that I am walking on a curved surface. I see houses and the A7, hills and the Gala Water, Torsonce woods, and sheep in fields. That's the world I know daily, but it looks different from outer space. That space picture gives a different perspective, one that has spoken powerfully to many about the beauty and fragility of our world.

When I was in my early thirties I had a bad bike accident which broke my jaw and meant that I had to spend a lot of time in the dentist's chair. In those days my

dentist was in St. Andrews. No one looks forward to going to the dentist, even if you know that you will be pleased later with the work done. But that dentist had a great distraction for his patients. Pinned to the ceiling was an aerial photograph of the town. I could lie back in the chair and distract myself from the poking and prodding and worse going on in my mouth by tracing familiar routes through the streets and seeing how small and different everything looked when viewed from the perspective given to that photographer. It was a bit like tracing routes on a map, but with the added interest and benefit of seeing not only the shape of things, but the things themselves - the houses, and parks, the phone boxes (very small) and bridges.

Seeing the familiar from a different perspective is good for us, because too often we forget that there is any other perspective than the one we're used to. We forget that the world is not just the little bits of it with which we are familiar; we forget that even these little bits can be seen and experienced in different ways by others.

In Chapter 40 of Isaiah, the prophet calls us away from any near-sightedness to remember God and shows us ourselves from his perspective. He says that from God's point of view the inhabitants of the world are like grasshoppers. Which is a salutary reminder. However God doesn't treat us the way we might treat grasshoppers. That's just the prophet's comparison of scale. God doesn't look down on us from on high; he calls us up to his level so that we can share his perspective and see the truth about our lives. So Jesus turned to God when he needed guidance. When we come to God in prayer we enter God's presence. True prayer cannot just be a worried rehearsing of our problems, it has to be a taking them to God, remembering that the Lord is the everlasting God the creator of the ends of the earth. Prayer is exposing our concerns to that perspective, and this is what Jesus did, and so he was guided as to what to do next.

The people of Capernaum wanted Jesus. They were searching for him that morning. They wanted him because he brought the Kingdom of God in action as well as in word, but it was the actions which grabbed them. Jesus could have stayed there, but if he had, in time they would have wanted him to fit with them, as old habits or thought and behaviour regained their strength and overtook the new teachings. Jesus could have stayed, but in time they would have wanted him to grow comfortable with them in the old way. They would have wanted his acts of power to be the important thing, when Jesus knew that they were simply illustrative material for the message he had to proclaim: the message that the Kingdom of God has come.

We too can get bogged down in the familiar. We can think that our habitual perspective on things is the only one possible or the only right one, and it is then that we are reminded that we need, as Isaiah says, to lift up our eyes and see. Looking to God will enlarge our perspective on ourselves and on our world. Looking to God will fill our eyes with the radiance of his glory, so that we see that light shed on everything and everyone we in our line of vision. Looking to God will bring us into his transforming Kingdom, where justice and steadfast love are the ruling forces and the good news is something which cannot be hoarded but has to be shared. Looking to God will give us his strength to renew ours, his vision to refresh and focus ours.

When Jesus took his situation to God in that time of early-morning prayer he saw the bigger picture. He saw the aerial photograph with more towns in it, more people moving about like grasshoppers; he saw the whole earth as from space, maybe, the map made human.

There is a world to save, to bring into God's Kingdom, one person at a time.

Once that Kingdom has taken root within us then we, like Peter, are called to go forth and bring it to others, not just to keep it to our own circle of friends. Surely when we know God's healing, transforming touch, our response should be that of Peter's mother-in-law: to get up and serve, to put ourselves at Christ's service, in the strength that only God can give.

This morning we come to the table again, bringing with us our own expectations, hopes and problems; bringing with us our own perspectives. As we gather and as we pray, may we pray that God would lift us up to where he is, so that we may leave this time of worship equipped by his strength to live the Kingdom-changed lives which Jesus came to bring us.