

**A Sermon preached by the Dean of Windsor,
the Rt Reverend Dr Christopher Cocksworth,
on 6th Sunday after Trinity 7th July 2024**

***The Readings:
1 Samuel 1.19-2.11 & Mark 6.1-13***

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Who are we?

Who are we? Where do we come from? What are we doing?

Those were the sorts of questions on the lips of the people of Jesus' home town, Nazareth, when he began teaching in the local synagogue, a place where he had been so familiar as boy and adult: 'Where did this man get all this? . . . Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary? What is this wisdom and what are these deeds of power being done by his hands?'

Jesus' past: son of Mary

Carpenter, Son of Mary, those were definitions of dismissal for the locals. 'They took offence at him', we're told. 'Jesus could do no deed of power there' because of their unbelief', we hear.

Jesus was, indeed, 'son of Mary' and he had been embedded in this community of Nazareth as child and then carpenter. But the gospel accounts of Jesus' life suggest we should view that positively, not negatively, and recognise all that Jesus received from Joseph who protected Jesus from the dangers of despotic Herod and taught him the skill of the plane and the lathe. And those same accounts show that we should rejoice in all that Jesus received from Mary who brought Jesus to birth, cared for

him as a child and – I suggest – played a critical part in his self-understanding and in the shape of his ministry.

Listen to the Magnificat that's sung to us every evening in this Chapel: 'God hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek'. 'He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away'.

And then map that onto Jesus' sermon in the Synagogue of Nazareth in the gospel of Luke's version of Jesus' return to his home town – sometimes known as – if you will forgive the word after the last six weeks – Jesus' manifesto: 'The Spirit of the Lord . . . has anointed me to bring good news to the poor . . . and sent me to proclaim release to the captives and . . . to let the oppressed go free'.

As the Choir sings Mary's Magnificat I have found myself looking in the evening light at the scene of Mary with Jesus on her lap in the great East Window of the Chapel, and I've wondered whether she sang that song not only during her visit to Elizabeth's home in her pregnancy but also while cradling Jesus in her arms as a baby and sitting with her son on her knee when he was a child – her vision of a transformed world being imbibed by Jesus as he grew and forming his own sense of mission for which he would one day give his life.

Mary song, though, didn't come to her from nowhere. She had imbibed the words of scripture. For as we see in our Old Testament lesson, Mary's Song, her vision for her people, her hope for the world, was shaped by the Song of Hannah as that woman of old rejoiced over all that God would do through Samuel, her son: 'The bows of the mighty are broken but the feeble gird on strength'. 'He raised up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap'.

My point is that Jesus was, indeed, ‘the carpenter’ and ‘the son of Mary’. He had been formed by the love of his mother, the life of his family and the deep traditions of Israel which had shaped him through scripture and synagogue.

My question to myself and to each of us is this: ‘Who – or what – are we forming?’ ‘Who – or what – has God put along our path to shape?’ – A child, a grandchild, a godchild, a friend, an apprentice, a student? Perhaps a project, a parish, a team, a regiment, a business? Or maybe a community, a charity, a godly, noble cause.

More than our past

Hannah in her infertility had pleaded with God for a child, and she was given Samuel. Her joy knew no bounds. But in one of the most poignant scenes in the Bible we hear today of ‘her lending him to the Lord’. She had sung her songs over him and now she gave him over to Eli the priest so that her son would hear God calling him in the silent hours of the night and be filled with God’s Spirit for the work that God had for him.

Mary may have had a vital part in forming Jesus, but she couldn’t hold on to him. There came a time when she needed to release him into his adult ministry, perhaps even to nudge him into his divine calling: ‘Son, they have no wine’. She said at Cana’s wedding. Maybe your hour *has* come.

And in the three short years that followed, she saw the water of her people’s piety that had turned stale by the failures of its religious leaders, transformed into the new, intoxicating wine of God’s favour and freedom. She saw eyes blinded for years opened, the helpless lame walk, the hungry thousands fed. And

she heard teaching that astonished its hearers. Wisdom that blew their minds. New vistas of understanding. All of it familiar on one level. It belonged to the hopes of Israel, to the heart of their law but was somehow dazzlingly new and daring: life – world – changing in its power.

My point is that Jesus – and Samuel before him – were formed by their mothers, their families, their teachers and mentors but that God took all of their past and swept it up by his Spirit into new heights opening up surprising vistas, uniquely calling, equipping, empowering, anointing each of them for the life and work and words he had for them to share with the world.

My question to myself and to each of us is ‘What is God calling us to entrust into God’s hand so that God can transform to a new level what we have formed and multiply the work of our hands?’ – A child, a grandchild, a godchild, a friend, an apprentice, a student? A project, a parish, a team, a regiment, a business? A community, a charity, a cause?

Ourselves: called and sent

We can see the same dynamic of forming and handing over in Jesus’ relationship with his disciples. ‘He called the twelve’, St Mark tells us, and then, ‘began to send them and gave them authority over the unclean spirits’.

I wept on our eldest son’s 18th birthday. It hit me just as we cut the cake. I had to retreat into another room. ‘I’ve had my chance’, I thought. ‘My parenting is done. He’s out on his own now’. Little did I realise then what I know now 22 years later, that once a father always a father. I certainly know that once a mother always a mother. They may move from your side but they never move from your heart and care.

It's a very imperfect image, but there's something like that going on in our relationship with Christ. When Jesus sent the disciples out to teach and to heal, they didn't cease to be his disciples. Nevertheless, something different happened at that moment. They moved from being followers who were only *with* Jesus, in his shadow, as it were, to followers who, while they remained with him spiritually and returned from time to time to him physically, they went *for* him, to speak his words and do his work: agents in his name.

Perhaps if I may venture a military analogy, they moved from being an aid-de-camp to becoming themselves a commander in the field, while remaining, of course, under the greater command of a higher authority.

So I end with this last question: To whom is Jesus sending us to be his agents, to go in his name with his word and with his works? Which person? Which place? Which project? Which need? Which adventure to make known the love and mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord?