

Home is where the heart is

What does the word 'home' mean to you? Is it the house where you live currently? Or is it a quite different building, village or town that you grew up in or where your family resided?

For me of course, it is, of course Sussex – but also a strong sense (and forgive me if I have told you before), that it is also a little village called Devoran, on the banks of an estuary of the River Fal. A model village – built as a port for the tin and copper trade, when Cornwall produced more tin and copper ore than anywhere else in the world. This was where my maternal ancestors lived. A beautiful village, in a situation looking across the estuary to a wondrous wooded hillside untainted by anything other than the romantic ruin of a mansion. and, when I was a child, full of wonderful characters. But the village has changed – it's a bit like 'How green was my valley!' Close to Truro, the characters are gone, and the professionals have taken over – the houses my great grandfather built for his family now sell for prices similar to houses in Cuckfield! So when I visit, there is a certain sadness. Perhaps I am too sentimental!

I wonder how Jesus felt on his return to Nazareth, coming home to his own family and community? Did he stay with Mary and his brothers and sisters in the family home? He preaches on Shabbat at his home synagogue – the spiritual dwelling where he has grown up in the faith of Israel - the equivalent of his parish church. We learn that the people at the synagogue are astounded at his teaching – and what of these acts of power that they have heard of? How can this be – this son of a carpenter and of Mary? And those words Mark records – 'They took offence at him,' words which have a sense of foreboding. His own people, many of whom he will have known since childhood take offence at these signs of his emerging mission. 'Prophets are not without honour except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.'

There is a real sense almost of bewilderment in Jesus' reaction – the mirror to those words- 'They took offence at him,' in verse 6 - 'He was amazed at their unbelief.'

Perhaps we might say that the greatest enemy to faith can be 'familiarity,' a refusal to believe that God's presence - and prophetic agents of that presence- could come to us in as familiar a form as the person next door!

There is that sense within our own society, isn't there, that faith is seen as some form of shackle - and then people run off to explore all sorts of experiences which they think will bring them fulfilment or a kick of ecstasy. Exotic experiences, dangerous sports, drugs – you name it. Much of this is chasing moonbeams thinking that they will bring ultimate happiness. Don't get me wrong – I like a nice holiday! But it all seems about expectations.

In religious terms, the Neighbours of Jesus have their own ideas about who the Messiah should be. The great warrior who will free the people from the scourge of occupation by the Romans. They are so caught up in this expectation that when he does come to them, as one of their own - as the son of Mary - they are unable to recognise him. The everyday is not perceived as a pathway to holiness. Familiarity, just déjà u. And yet actually I think that

progress in spiritual growth - living in the Spirit- is almost always an ability to recognise God at work in the ordinary everyday experience.

One has only to look at the lives of many of the great saints to see that they never ceased being filled with wonder at the mysterious presence of God surrounding the steps of their journey through everyday life. Think of St John of the Cross, locked in a tiny cell by his fellow monks for daring of reform, yet still capable of composing his great Spiritual Canticle; of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who saw Christ in the face of those who lived and died in the gutters; of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who wrote in his book, *The Violence of God*, "I don't want to be an anti, against anybody. I simply want to be the builder of a great affirmation: the affirmation of God, who loves us and who wants to save us." - he, of course was gunned down at the altar having spoken out for his own flock in El Salvador against poverty, social injustice, assassinations and torture.

Home at its most comfortable, is - in the word of the old saying, 'where the heart is.' And it is at home where our proclamation of the Gospel begins - and that is sometimes the hardest of places to begin - as our Saviour experienced. Home for many will speak of comfort, but sometimes also complacency. Yet in remembering that even Jesus marvelled at people's unbelief, he absolutely calls us to reveal his **love** - something capable of leading both ourselves and others to the hope of the most astonishing and amazing fulfilment. And this sometimes means letting go of the pleasures of partial fulfilment, of domestic bliss and the spiritual suffocation that family members, even members of the family of faith, inevitably inflict upon each other.

Jesus doesn't wait – he gets on with it. He goes elsewhere to teach and then commissions the disciples to proclaim the Good News. This commission was their task, as it is also yours and mine. Does this commission seem daunting?

Think of Paul. He experienced huge difficulties in seeking to proclaim the Good News, but he never gave in. In the reading from 2 Corinthians we heard today we hear his struggle: 'I'm flawed – I don't have the strength or the eloquence. I don't have the staying power. Then he feels the pull of Jesus Christ within his life – Jesus, who says to him, as he says to each one of us, *'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'* We are called to proclaim the Gospel as we are and who we are, knowing that in so doing we are transforming the world as well as ourselves. Then, wherever we are, we are truly home because through faith this is where the heart finds a true resting place.