I simply love this story from the gospel of Luke, we have heard of how Jesus has been growing in popularity and how he has been accepted in a variety of other synagogues, and now finally he returns home to his birthplace in Nazareth and goes to the synagogue as was his custom.

Returning home to take up a leading and significant role in your former church is always a demanding task. At first glance it may seem like a good idea and an opportunity to become reacquainted with many old friends, and of course that remains true. I remember after I was ordained the parish priest from my old church always said he would invite me back in order to preach, but sadly that never happened. The only time I have been back in an official capacity was to take my late Aunt’s funeral.

I recall how on that occasion I felt a little uncomfortable. I was surrounded by my family most of whom have no interest in the church at all. I took my place and led the worship and then came the time for me to speak. Now my Aunt was very special to me but her later years after the loss of her husband were to be spent in a secure home environment as she was to suffer from dementia and was unable to recognise anyone for many years. Her family lived in Wales and hardly ever visited and so I spoke about the Aunt that I had spent a lot of time with placing a heavy emphasis on personal aspects of the life that she and her husband had shared with me and with my wife. Indeed, even mentioning how I still have the crucifix she bought for me at the point of my ordination, and how it was from their home that my wife was to spend the evening before our marriage and was to be given away by my Uncle Wilf.

Afterwards the family approached me and thanked me, but I was deeply saddened by the fact that they all expressed so much wonderment about the things that I had said never realising for a moment how close we had become, or of the earlier influences that she had made on my life.

This says a great deal not only about the complexity of family life but also about local expectations. It says a great deal too about aspects of leadership and of the significance of place. For Jesus to return to his birthplace and then to lead in the synagogue was a significant step for him to take. He read from the prophecy of Isaiah rolled up the scroll and then said today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

This was the normal practice of religious leaders of the day, unlike today whereby custom I speak to you without interruption. Jesus will have shared the scripture and then entered into debate about it with those present, he of course raises a very contentious point, he declares that the scripture has been fulfilled by him, in as much he is declaring that it is he to whom the scripture points and in listening to him those present will be re-guided into the true path of righteousness.

At first, they were all eyes and ears, they were delighted that one of their own could speak so well and with conviction. They had heard so much about the marvellous works that he had been doing elsewhere and now were fully expecting him to do the same thing for them but then things soon turned.

I was not that welcome in my old church as I had changed and was now somebody different in addition, they had nurtured me, and I had grown but I had left them behind as my call from God was to go elsewhere and not to stay with them. Here Jesus declares that it is not his calling to bring healing and perform miraculous deeds in their midst because a prophet is never welcomed in their hometown, going on to provide solid evidence of this through the actions of Elijah and Elisha who great as they were did very little in their own cities but exercised their power from God elsewhere.

That was when the mood changed, and such a huge change, moving from that which they wanted to hear and believe to the point of throwing him off the top of a cliff!

Thankfully he slips away to exercise his ministry elsewhere simply proving the point that a prophet or a priest is never really welcomed back into their former communities.

What this account really shows is the really demanding role of those called by God to exercise their ministry. People can very easily be tempted to follow people with charisma and charm, but they will soon get ready to throw them over the precipice if they fail to deliver. What is crucial here is what it is that they fail to deliver.

At this point in time those who lead us are on the edge of such a precipice, such is the disgust and anger being directed toward the Prime Minister that the things which have been achieved are simply forgotten as we get absorbed in the reality of political life and demand justice, at whatever cost.

Jesus however does not deter from his path there is no grovelling apology, no acceptance that he has got things wrong and misread the mood of the people. For Jesus there is only one path, and he sticks to it doggedly. The people soon forget all of the good works done by him to others and reject him out of hand because they are not prepared to be treated differently by him.

But here lies the reality of the situation Jesus comes to save the sinner and not the righteous; the chosen people of God have had the prophets to guide them but most of those they ignored, rejected, or abused. Jesus is making it clear to his own family, friends, and neighbours that they must let him go to others whilst recognising their own failures and seek to repent and to move forward with him.

It us not so much that Jesus is refusing to do things in their midst but rather that he is reminding them that this task is theirs and not his alone. Jesus comes to bring good news to the poor, to release those held captive by their sins, to enable those around him to open their own eyes and see the way forward for themselves and so be enabled to be freed from the oppression of the past and look forward to a new freedom into which they will flourish in the future.

The exposition of the text from Isaiah is a rallying cry to the people of Israel to be the instrument of God’s mercy, and that is the same message that Jesus places before us today.

Do not wait for another to come to fulfil the demands of God but recognise them for what they are and seek to fulfil them yourselves, for only when we accept the responsibility placed upon us as followers of Jesus, will the world be transformed, and good news be brought to the poor, the captives released, ears and eyes be opened and justice prevail so that all people can be accepted into the glory of the promise of the kingdom.

Thanks be to God. Amen.