

### **Mark 6:1-13**

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

### **The Church has Left the Building July 15, 2018**

On Tuesday, June 12th, the Golden State Warriors and the City of Oakland hosted a parade to honor the 2018 NBA Champions, Golden State Warriors. The parade began in Downtown Oakland, made its way to Uptown before finishing off near the shores of Lake Merritt. More than a million fans cheered on the Dubs as the team rode busses and often got off of them throughout the parade route on a sun-splashed day in the Bay. What a great way for the hometown to welcome back her basketball superstars.

In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus and the disciples had a very different experience when they returned to their hometown. The disciples were coming back home and must have felt like celebrities. Jesus’ popularity was exploding throughout the countryside as stories of his healing spread from village to village: the one who was paralyzed is walking, the man possessed by demons is healed, the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years is well, Jairus’ daughter is alive. Jesus had even shared with them that he was the Messiah and had showed them his power over creation by calming the sea in the midst of a storm. They were followers of the man who had power over nature, who could heal both the peasants and the powerful.

Jesus’ message about God’s Kingdom was new and intoxicating. And now it seemed that the entire Galilean countryside was interested in this man who could perform miracles. With the reports of Jesus’ preaching and teaching and healing spreading across the region, the disciples might have wondered what kind of reception Jesus and they would receive in Nazareth...cheering crowds, a parade, maybe a feast!

Mark does not report on their homecoming except to tell us that on the Sabbath, Jesus went to his synagogue and preached. The other gospels fill in his message that day. He told them that he came to set people free—free from the burdens of sin, regret, shame, pride, guilt—anything that prevented them from accepting God’s power and grace into their lives. And when he was done, his family and his friends looked at him and thought he was crazy. They started talking with each other in disbelief . . . "Is this Mary’s son? You have got to be kidding! We know who he is! He is merely a carpenter. What gives him the right to speak to us with such authority?" These hometown folks were offended.

Jesus marveled, the text says, at their unbelief, their lack of trust in him, as he pointed out to his disciples: *There's no respect here for someone who dares to speak words of truth that challenge people to see God working in new ways.*

Jesus knew the words he preached were hard and his path was difficult but even he marveled at the disbelief from his own relatives and friends. The Gospel Jesus was proclaiming, and the disciples would learn to share, was a Gospel full of difficult things; things like welcoming the stranger and loving those who are unlovable, of living your life as if you really believe that God's kingdom has already begun on this earth.

Jesus' rejection by those who knew him or thought they did, is something most of us have experienced in our own lives. We can be rejected for many reasons and it is especially painful when it comes from our family or friends, the ones we love and trust, or here in the church. Author King Duncan shared this story about a young man who experienced something of what happened to Jesus this morning.

"Steven was a young man who felt the call of God on his life. He came from a really close family. He finished college and then went off to seminary. After finishing seminary, he came back home before going to his first church. He visited with all of his relatives for about a week. He stopped by the church and talked to his hometown pastor. The pastor asked him if he would like to preach that upcoming Sunday. Steven felt honored and took the pastor up on the invitation. Sunday morning came and after hours, yes, even days, of preparation he stepped up behind the pulpit, looked out at the congregation of friends and relatives and started to expound the knowledge that he had learned.

Well, he had hardly begun, when his young niece, Kathleen, about six years old, stepped out into the aisle and put her hands on her hips, her left foot out in front of the other, her head cocked to one side. Then she said in a very loud and clear voice for her age, "Uncle Steven, you don't know what you are talking about!" I don't know how Uncle Steven finished that sermon. But undoubtedly it was an experience he will never forget.

It's hard to impress the people at home, isn't it? The whole world may be singing your praises, but at home, folks see you as the shy kid with two left feet. Or as the wild and crazy guy who was always in trouble."

How do you deal with rejection when you sincerely offer your ideas, your wisdom, your gifts to someone and that person rejects you? *Well, Jesus provides us with a good model: Brush the dust off your feet and keep going.* Don't fight, don't defend, just let it be, and move on. It may not be the right time, it may not be the right message, you may not be the right person. So, let it go and give it to God and continue to see that person as a child of God.

And yet, the gospel story is not just about times we are rejected as we faithfully follow Jesus. Sometimes we, too, are the hometown congregation who have difficulty trusting in the new ways God is calling us and leading us. Sometimes we too are those who are blind to God's presence, indifferent to God's power.

In his spiritual autobiography "Now and Then," Frederick Buechner writes about his encounter with Agnes Sanford, a Christian healer. "The most vivid image she presented," writes Buechner, "was of Jesus standing in church services all over Christendom with his hands tied behind his back, unable to do any mighty works because the ministers who led the services either didn't expect him to do them or didn't dare ask him to do them . . ." What a bold image: Jesus standing in the church, his hands tied behind his back. Then Buechner added this: "I recognized immediately my own kinship with those ministers." I must confess, I sometimes hinder Jesus' power by my lack of trust or interest. What about you?

*Now the second half of our gospel lesson this morning talks about Jesus' response to being rejected.*

After this ultimate slap in the face, Jesus did not sit down with his followers and complain about the narrow-mindedness of his family and friends in Nazareth. Jesus did not choose to give up. Instead, he went to other villages and the gospel story tells us that he continued teaching.

Jesus also gathered his disciples and gave them a pep talk about going out and sharing the message of God's love and grace and some basic instructions about traveling light. Now, traveling light for us Americans is a bit different than what Jesus was talking about. My mother was just here for a visit and she was so proud that she only brought one suitcase and a carry on. She kept bragging that her bag only weighed 42 pounds, which felt like 60 to me! She has never been one to travel lightly. And I'm pretty sure this isn't what Jesus meant.

My mother would not have met the baggage limit for a trek with the disciples. All they could take with them was: A staff, sandals, and a tunic. In modern terms, that would be a walking stick, shoes, and one outfit. Why would Jesus leave them so vulnerable especially if they might not be welcomed or provided for?

I think in part, this is a commentary of the community at large. a community that prides itself and defines itself and has long expressed its faith, by extending hospitality to strangers and family. This is why the nativity stories are so powerful. Because they reiterate the lack of hospitality given to Jesus and his family. That not one single member of their own family would take them in. The Jewish community that was supposed to welcome them, well...didn't. Something that is coming full circle in our story today. So, Jesus sends them out just as vulnerable as children, into the community, to see not only how the disciples respond but how we, the community of God's people respond as well. And perhaps also, to let them know first hand, as Paul suggests, that it is in our weakness that God's strength is revealed.

Traveling light meant they needed to learn to trust in God's grace and power, they needed to learn to forgive and be forgiven, they needed to depend on others, they needed to accept that they would be rejected and to learn to move on. Jesus called together this group of disciples who had been his friends from the start and he said to them, "I want you to be my partners and it's time for you to get started. Remember to trust in God and the Holy Spirit to lead the way. Sometimes the faith of others is weak, but you encourage them along, ok?" Jesus gave them his authority to heal and to release people from demons that controlled their lives. When he was finished with his instructions, they knew that something had changed forever. They could feel it. Jesus believed in them.

So they went out and they healed people and cast out demons. They surprised everyone, perhaps most of all themselves. Imagine that happening here, right here in the midst of this worship service. Jesus looking each one of us in the eye, touching us with his hand, praying over us, giving us his authority.

### **Grassy Creek:**

Then he starts calling out names:

Reid and Mimi, I'm sending you to Bakersville,  
Mike and Jane, you're going all the way to Marshall,  
Bill and Laura, I want you in Plumtree,  
and Sarah and Whitney, you head off for Burnsville,  
John and Beth, get on over to Loafers Glory,  
And each one of us is called, two by two,  
to go and share the good news.

### **Newdale:**

Then he starts calling out names:

Bob and Becky, I'm sending you to Bakersville,  
Jim and Betty, you're going all the way to Marshall,  
Denise and Marilyn, I want you in Plumtree,  
and Desi and Kenny, you head off for Burnsville,  
Hattie Lou and Sam, I need you to get over to Micaville,  
And each one of us is called, two by two,  
to go and share the good news.

Jesus tells us: “Don’t forget to travel light. No iPad or lap top. Just share your story of how God has touched your life, be friends with those whom others reject, bring healing and peace to broken people, and offer the gift of new life that you have experienced in Christ.” Eugene Peterson translates Jesus' words this way in *The Message*: *"Don't think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. You are the equipment."*

Every Sunday morning Jesus does just that: blesses us and sends us out to be his missionaries. You know why? Because he believes in us, in you and me. Even with all our weaknesses and fears, He wants us to partner with him. We, too, are being called to travel light and be the gospel in our own lives and with this congregation, here in these communities where we live. I hope that when I see you again you will have stories to tell of how God used you to bring healing and hope in this weary world. Thanks be to God, Amen.