

Ezekiel 2:1-5

Mark 6:1-13

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

“Have mercy upon us, O Lord;  
for we have had more than enough of contempt.”  
AMEN!

“We have had more than enough contempt.”

Boy, is that an understatement!

Contempt is the feeling that  
a person is beneath consideration,  
worthless, or deserving scorn.

We have had more than enough of contempt.

Have mercy upon us, O Lord. (Pause)

You meet all sorts of people at the capitol building.

On one of my walks up to the tall building  
a couple years ago, with clergy collar and  
black shirt identifying everything about me,

I walked toward a small group of  
people who were setting up  
a table outside near the steps.

A woman’s eyes locked with mine and  
she stood straight and

turned to smile at me.

I smiled back and we greeted one another.

She said, “Father! I’m so glad you are here!  
It is so important when clergy shows up  
to speak to the legislature about

the sanctity of marriage between  
a man and a woman and for  
the protection of businesses to follow  
their religious beliefs!”

I looked down at the small rainbow ribbon  
I had pinned to my pocket and  
looked up while smiling and said,

“I’m here to tell people God loves and  
welcomes all people regardless of  
our human divisions.”

A realization came to her eyes,  
“Oh,” she said.

“You’re one of those gay loving pastors.” (Pause)

It was said with that same tone and contempt.

As I turned to reply, thankfully reason and

a calmness came upon me from  
somewhere other than my own will,  
I paused and said,  
“Well, yes! I’d say am!” :-)

I am thankful for that outside reason and  
calmness which came over me,  
I don’t always adhere to it but thankfully, I  
did that day.

Yet, I was still filled with contempt inside  
about the audacity of that woman. (Pause)

The humanness recognized that day, and  
other days at the capitol, reminds me of  
the ways we can become so caught  
up looking backward, instead of forward.

The ways we form opinions  
about things, or people, and assume  
that those short stories totally define them.  
(Pause)

That was what happened to Jesus when he went  
to his hometown and taught in the synagogue.

To those, hometown Nazareth folks,  
he was still only the child of former days and  
they defined Jesus by that single story.

They were so stuck in looking backward that they took offense (or stumbled) at him.

We are not told specifically what he taught that day, but we know he'd just returned home from being out of town.

He was just in a place near the Sea of Galilee where he was touched by a desperate woman with a 12 year long hemorrhage.

She was desperate for healing and for community.

Before that, Jesus was approached by a desperate synagogue leader named Jairus with a dying child on his hands.

He was desperate to have Jesus heal his little girl.

Now, Jesus is at home, and it appears that the small town of Nazareth has already decided who Jesus was and were not open to see Him anew.

Maybe they weren't desperate enough?

Whatever the reason, we find that their close-mindedness had a negative effect on Jesus' powers.

Mark told us that his deeds of power were hindered.

Why?

Mark explained that it was a  
because of their unbelief. (Pause)

There's a really cool word in the Biblical Greek: *pistis*.

I know it sounds funny, but *pistis* means  
faith, belief, and trust.

So the hometown folks had unbelief,  
but they also had distrust, and  
lacked faith in Jesus and in what  
Jesus was doing.

And the distrust, unbelief, and lack of faith  
mattered enough to hinder Jesus' power.

It's interesting to note that after that,  
what some might call a setback for Jesus,  
He sent out the twelve in pairs.

What was one voice is now twelve voices,

what was one set of hands for healing is  
now twelve sets of hands and  
the experience was successful! (Pause)

Now, it is usually at this point that,  
we in the church, begin to plug ourselves  
into the story.

We put ourselves in either the shoes of Jesus  
who is rejected by his hometown or  
we believe we are the disciples who are welcomed.

I get caught up in identifying with  
one of those characters in the story, too!

But what if we were to see ourselves as either  
the hometown Nazareth folk or  
the people in the towns that welcomed  
the disciples and received healing?

Now, that's something, isn't it?

That's a real paradigm shift which asks us  
the questions about our own faith, belief, and trust  
or the challenges to our faith, belief, and trust.

As a community of believers at St. Stephen,  
how are we letting our routines hide us

from letting God into our lives? (Pause)

It is like having a favorite hymn.

That's good, there's nothing wrong with having a favorite hymn, but unfamiliar hymns have beautiful things to offer, too.

Even unfamiliar tunes can reveal something new to us about God, but we bristle at the unfamiliar stuff.

I mention this because it is human for us to react that way, but the wonderful thing is we are adaptable to change.

We can sense the negative reactions to the new things God reveals and pause to improve our response to those things.

(Pause)

There's a story about a pastor that gave the annual "give-up-something-for Lent" sermon.

She pastored a small church in rural Pennsylvania.

Now, early March can be a chilly time in  
that part of the country,  
if not downright cold.

She ended the sermon saying,  
“As an example of penitence to the  
rest of the community, this congregation  
will worship in an unheated church  
for the whole of Lent!”

As the congregation made their  
way out into the damp, late winter chill,  
the pastor asked one of the members,

“Ah, Mrs. James, and what will you be  
giving up for Lent?”

Mrs. James replied, “Church!” :-)

We let comfort and we let ordinary routines  
hide the way God is working in our midst.

Now don't worry, we won't be turning off  
the a/c for the summer, but we also need  
to be open to new things that may open  
our eyes to see the life-saving God  
in front of us.

Are we the folks from Jesus' hometown

who weren't able to recognize Jesus or  
are we the folks in the towns that welcomed  
the disciples because they could  
recognize something new from God?

“The wonderment of God is that God does  
use the ordinary and the routine to fulfill  
God's purpose.”

Think of the routine of quiet time  
will a cup of coffee and a devotional.

The routine of making your bed or  
carting the kids around or  
writing a letter can be times  
blessed by God.

One of my favorite Buddhist teachings is  
to practice deep breathing while  
focusing on washing the dishes  
when washing the dishes.

To resist the temptation to just get it done,  
but to be fully present in the  
important task of washing.

Am I perfect at it all the time?  
Of course not! Just ask Colleen,

she'll tell you! :-) (Pause)

But, we are a people on a journey.

New things will come around each corner  
that will give us a chance to practice pausing  
before we react negatively or  
reject it too quickly.

The good news is that even though Jesus  
was rejected too quickly in his hometown,  
the experience initiated the  
first missionary thrust for Jesus' followers  
to do something new and grace-  
filled. (Pause)

You have probably heard  
the funny story told long ago.

There was a man stranded in his house  
when a flood came to his neighborhood.

He had no time to escape so he climbed onto  
the roof of his house and prayed to God  
for a divine rescue.

As the water rose even higher,  
a man in a row boat came by.

“Can I help you?” He shouted from the row boat.

“No,” the man called back.

“The Lord will rescue me!”

Soon the water was at his waste when  
a second boat went by.

Again there was the offer to help.

Again the man replied,

“No, the Lord will take care of me.”

Not long after that the water was at  
the man’s neck when a helicopter whirled  
into view.

The stranded man shouted, “Go on!

God will rescue me!”

Well, he drowned and went to heaven.

Once through the gates of heaven

he asked the Lord,

“I’ve been faithful. What happened?

Why didn’t you save me?”

The Lord replied, “Well, I really don’t know  
what happened.

I sent two row boats and a helicopter!”

It's a funny story but makes the point clear  
that sometimes we think that God's work  
only occurs in grand events  
like seas splitting or empty tombs.

God does work that way, but more often  
God works in the ordinary, undramatic,  
and routine encounters of life.

Even in the parts of life that  
we identify as low points,  
keep watch, for something amazing  
but often in ordinary form to occur.

Welcome that good news!

Embrace that trust and hold the door open  
and for God's sakes get in the boat!

AMEN!