

A Prophet Without Honor

July 3-4, 2012

The Sixth Saturday/Sunday after Pentecost [Year B]

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Sermon preached at The Lutheran Church of the Covenant/Triune Lutheran Church

Maple Heights/Broadvue Heights, OH

Ezekiel 2:1-5; Psalm 123; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6: 1-13

Let us pray. *God of grace and glory, at times your prophets were ignored, belittled, and unwelcome. Trusting that we, too, are called to be prophets, remind us, through your word, of the mission journey you set before us. Fill us with your Spirit, and support us by your gentle hands, that we may be bold and persevere in speaking your word and living our faith. Now let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our collective hearts, be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen*

My sisters and brothers in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

First of all, let me state what a joy it is to be here with you today. Retirement has been an adjustment for me. And today is, for me, something like the first story we hear in our Gospel reading for this Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Jesus returning to his hometown.

Going back to your hometown or wherever you grew up is always an adventure. If you've been away for a while, people always tend to see you as the person you used to be – not as the person you have become.

If you were well-liked by everyone, all well and good. Going home can be a joyful time. But if your memories aren't all that pleasant, going home can be a nightmare. Whatever your experience as a youngster can trigger some deep-seated emotions, even trauma, when you are forced to relive them.

In the first part of our story, Jesus has just returned home from a road trip. This was obviously not a social visit where Jesus came home for the 4th of July holiday to see old friends and family. No, he was here on a mission. He came as a miracle worker of sorts, with his disciples following along.

The people in his hometown have undoubtedly heard about the spectacular things he's been doing. That sort of news travels fast. But no matter how many people Jesus had healed, how many demons he had driven out, or how many little children's lives he had restored, those who heard him teach in the synagogue, as our story tells us, were astounded.

People couldn't seem to get beyond the fact that this is Jesus, Mary's boy, a carpenter.

Where did he learn to do all these miraculous things? Where did he get all this power?

The people come off as mean-spirited, jealous, you can almost hear the envious criticisms: "Hey, we've known this fellow since he was a kid. We know his mother and his brothers and sisters. He is just a carpenter. He is no better than we are."

A closer look at our Gospel reading reveals some interesting insights.

One point that isn't so obvious here but worth noting is that in Jesus' time, carpenters and other tradesmen were looked down upon. They were in the lower ranks of society; they were in the same category as peasants. Lower than what we would today consider "blue-collar" workers. His family would be from what we today consider the other side of the tracks. People of Jesus' stature

would never even dream of buying a house in Pepper Pike or Moreland Hills, even though they might have a hand in building it.

The other point worth noting is that no mention is made of his father. To identify Jesus as his mother's son might have been intended as a way of shaming Jesus by insinuating that he didn't have a father.

The circumstances of his origin in no way account for the stories about him. His common beginnings do not fit the assessment that he is a prophet. The result is scandal and fear

Jesus is seen as someone who is not merely exceeding expectations but rather is overreaching. Jesus does not meet the criteria. Jesus does not measure up.

And who knows what they thought about this entourage of questionable characters that Jesus brought along with him?

When one experiences rejection and threats especially from one's hometown folks, those whom you thought would offer encouragement and support, the natural tendency might be to withdraw, lick your wounds, reevaluate your situation. This was not the case with Jesus.

Jesus uses it as a teaching moment for his disciples. That same rejection that Jesus experienced in his hometown is what he prepares his disciples for when he sends them on their mission a little later on in our story. People will refuse to listen to the good news that they had to proclaim.

We may find that kind of thinking ridiculous, but what we fail to see is that we are in many ways like the people of Jesus' hometown.

Who is Jesus to us?

In this age of internet, e-mail, instant messaging, smart phones, blue tooth, Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, Zoom, and all kinds of other technological wizardry of this age; do we have the confidence to trust and to believe in someone who walked this earth some two thousand years ago.

Do we have enough confidence to believe he would grant the requests we present to him? At this moment, we are waiting with eager expectation to see what he will do with "us" at this place and time in history as we slowly and cautiously emerge from a seemingly endless pandemic.

How often have closed minds and closed hearts caused us to miss a message?

Would Jesus be amazed at "our" lack of faith in who he is? Who is he to us anyway?

It may be that the people's lack of faith revealed itself in the fact that they didn't seek Jesus' help. They didn't bring their sick for healing. They didn't bring their children for his blessing. They didn't come to listen to his teaching. Faith implies actions. Without faith in Jesus, the people did nothing.

The good news is that despite the rejection Jesus experienced, he continued to go about the villages preaching, teaching, and healing.

Despite the rejections he knew the disciples would have to endure, he sent them anyway.

And despite the rejection his message still receives today, he still speaks to us, and he continues to send us.

If Jesus walked in the door of this church today and sent you out to downtown Cleveland or right here to Maple/Broadview Heights, or any other place...would you go? Go without preparation? Go, believing you have power over evil spirits? Go with no money, no credit cards?

Lamar Williamson, in his commentary on Mark, writes that:

The spiritual climate of a congregation, its sense of expectancy, its openness to the power of God at work through Jesus Christ, will in fact have a great deal to do with how much God's power can accomplish in that particular community. Our unbelief does not render God impotent, but when it is dominant in a congregation its dampening effect on the mighty acts of God in that time and place is evident and sad. [p. 116-117]¹

What differences should it make if council members or committee members believe Jesus is present at their meetings? What about Jesus' powerful presence in our worship services, or in our own lives? How much does lack of faith keep us from reaping as many benefits as God would give?

When we look at what needs to be done in our churches and think pensively, "I do not have the power to do this," we miss the core of the gospel message. What God calls us to do, God empowers us to do. If the only things that happen in our churches are the things we do in our own power, we have reason for concern. God calls. God empowers.

But the goal isn't simply to get new members, even though there's nothing wrong with new church members! But in your ministry of mission, of evangelism, the purpose is not 'to get them on your side' or even 'to grow the church,' but simply to tell others about the God who has come to mean so much to you, to me, to us."

The work of God, happens best, it seems, when the people hear God still speaking to them in their own place and time, in their own situation, and listen for where God is leading them and whom God is sending to lead them.

There's an openness called for on the part of us as the people of God to listen and accept God's gifts with an attitude of humility, to be open to God's voice, to be humble and led even as we lead. This present living is a time of listening and proclaiming.

Consider in what ways you are encouraging or inhibiting God's work in your lives, your households, this community, and the world. Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea, in fact, to take a few moments in silent prayer to contemplate those places you feel you may be resisting God's activity in your lives. Is there some area – some regret you can't get over, some grudge you can't let go, some hurt that has come to define you, some anger that has taken hold of you – that you are having difficulty entrusting to God?

At the same time, is there some opportunity you feel God might be inviting you to or some challenge God may be setting for you that you find difficult to embrace or entertain?

Notice, these questions aren't about the quality of our salvation; rather, they are about the character of our Christian life – our faithfulness. Salvation is not the issue here. God has taken care of that. The task at hand for us is sharing that good news of God's salvation with others, of making Christ known in the world. With faith and confidence, we can witness boldly and faithfully.

I came across this Franciscan Benediction which speaks to the topic of mission, and I close with it in hopes that you keep it in mind as we strive to make Christ known in the world.

May God bless us with discomfort
at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that we may work for economic justice for all people.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer
from pain, hunger, homelessness and rejection,
so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them
and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness
to believe that we can make a difference in the world
so that we can do what others claim cannot be done.²

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in
Christ Jesus.

In the name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

¹Williamson Jr., Lamar, *Mark: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*
(Westminster John Knox Press, 2009)

² Sister Ruth Marlene Fox, OSB, *A Non-Traditional Blessing*, [The Benedictine Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery, Dickinson, ND](#)