

Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead, New York
Marianne K. Tomecek, Interim Pastor

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Proper 9B– July 4, 2021

Ezekiel 2:1-7

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Psalm 123

Mark 6:1-13

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN!

The Jesus I Never Knew is a book written in 1995 by an evangelical author named Philip Yancey. Maybe you're familiar with it. His theme was that, especially in the United States, we think of Jesus only as "meek and mild," someone who was so virtuous that he seemed too good to be true – or human. And people would say, "Yes, but he **was** the Son of God, so of course he was able to withstand all sorts of challenges and still maintain his sense of self, his equilibrium.

But Yancey would respond that while it's true that Jesus of Nazareth was fully divine, he also was fully human, so he faced the same kind of obstacles in life that we do. And in order to meet Jesus as he really was, we need to read more carefully to recognize his humanity as presented in the Gospels, as well as his divinity.

This year, as we spend most of our gospel time in the one of Mark's telling, we can keep in mind that Mark's Jesus, unlike Luke's or Matthew's, didn't have a miraculous birth with singing choirs of angels, visiting shepherds and worshiping wise men. There wasn't any account of the twelve year old Jesus teaching even the old scribes in the temple.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus makes his first appearance as a grown man when he comes to John to be baptized. And John isn't identified as his cousin in Mark's gospel, either. After Jesus is washed in the Jordan, a voice from heaven says to him, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." (1:11.) Some people understand this to say that God adopted Jesus as Son at the baptism.

All of this is to say that we can consider today's Gospel account as one that portrays the human aspect of Jesus. He's just had some extraordinary experiences in his early public ministry, teaching, preaching, healing – and even raising Jairus' daughter from the dead.

And then he faces rejection by his hometown neighbors when he comes for a visit

and they are offended by his preaching. Not so much the substance of what he says, but the fact that this Jesus who they've known all his life, and who is a carpenter, suddenly is acting like a learned rabbi. We might say that he's acting more important than he is. They just can't accept that he's someone other than who they know him to be. Suddenly, he's the Jesus **they** never knew.

So they reject him, in the process insulting him by identifying him as Mary's son, not using the traditional description of his being his father's son, which would have recognized his legitimacy.

His reaction? He quotes this saying, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house" (6:4), which we might understand as his dismissing their rejection, maybe to save face with his disciples. But Mark also tells us that "he was amazed at their unbelief." (6:6a.) He had a human reaction to their dismissal.

But Jesus was human in another way. He was resilient in the face of their rejection. Rather than getting angry or withdrawing to his childhood home, "he went about among the villages teaching." (6:6b.)

And then he called the twelve disciples and sent them out, two by two, sharing his ministry with them. He told them that they were to do what they'd seen him doing: casting out unclean spirits and healing people. And they were to rely on the hospitality of the people to whom they were going to proclaim that all should repent. This hospitality would provide whatever they needed: food, housing and anything else. All they could take was their one set of clothing, a pair of sandals and a staff for walking.

We don't know exactly how long the disciples had seen Jesus at work up to that time, but it certainly wasn't years of apprenticeship. And we **do** know that they still were having a hard time understanding who he was (remember their reaction to his calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee? It was about the same as the Nazareth townspeople's reaction to his preaching: "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" [4:41.]).

This weakness in the disciples actually is good news for us: we don't have to be a highly successful disciple for Jesus to enlist our ministry. His choice of us (and each of us has been chosen through our baptism) is all that's needed for us to be

disciples. Our being enlisted in the outreach of proclamation and service follows automatically.

One other thing that Jesus warns his disciples (those in the past, and the present day). We should be prepared for people to reject us as they rejected him. His advice when people fail to welcome them or refuse to hear their teaching, is to use the time-honored gesture of shaking the dust off their feet “as a testimony against them.” (6:11.) This gesture reminds me of the saying that someone’s response to an insult is like water rolling off a duck’s back. It doesn’t even leave a trace of the disregard shown in the duck’s feathers.

And it is in the best tradition of the prophet, as we heard from the Lord’s instruction to Ezekiel about proclaiming “thus says the Lord God” to the rebellious people of Israel who were impudent and stubborn and wouldn’t listen to God’s word (2:1-5). We are to be prepared, therefore, to not be listened to when we proclaim the good news. We can shake the dust off our feet – figuratively – and just go on with our mission of proclamation and service.

Can we do that? It’s not easy. One of our strongest desires as human beings is to be accepted, to be loved. Can we tell ourselves, when we face human rejection, that we **are** accepted and loved – by God – and that’s enough?

Can we convince our human selves that, when our Christian values aren’t consistent with the values of our society and we’re maybe not included in events hosted by people with those values, that we needn’t feel left out?

Can we carry on when we hope to be free of human rejection and God doesn’t say “yes,” as God didn’t relieve Paul of the thorn in his flesh? (2 Corinthians 12:7-9.) How will our stamina hold out? Is it enough for us to know that we are in good company (in fact, **the best** company), along with Moses, who asked to be allowed to enter the promised land; with David, who asked that his son not die; and Jesus, who asked that the cup of suffering and death be taken from him, if possible, when God didn’t say, “yes?” Will we hear, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (12:9), and be filled with that power as we experience insults, hardships and persecutions for the sake of Jesus Christ? Let’s pray that we will.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. C: Amen