

## Proper 9B 2018 Sermon

### *Mark 6:1-13*

*Jesus 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.*

When I lived in Plainview, Texas, I met a visiting priest, Fr. Jones,<sup>1</sup> from the Anglican Diocese of Willochra, in Southern Australia. Now, as you know, there are LOTS of sheep in Australia, lots of wool, and Fr. Jones had made a hobby of weaving.

Fr. Jones shared with me that he had once done an "exchange" with a priest in England: Fr. Jones worked at the English priest's parish for a year, and the English priest worked at Fr. Jones' parish in Australia for a year. The first Sunday Fr. Jones was at the English parish, an elderly matriarch of the parish invited him to tea at her home, along with some of her friends from the church. Upon arriving at the woman's home, Fr. Jones discovered that the woman had an antique loom in her home. Fr. Jones asked if he could try out the loom. The woman was a bit wary and skeptical, but consented; and Fr. Jones sat at the loom and skillfully worked at the weaving. The woman, surprised, turned to one of her friends and said, "Why, Maude, isn't he clever! Isn't he clever! You don't expect the clergy to be clever!"

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus returns to his hometown and the people who live there ask one another, "Where did this man get all this? ... 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?” Isn’t this the snotty-nosed kid we saw grow up here? Who is *he*, that he thinks he’s so clever?

We don’t expect people we know well – or *think* we know well! – to be clever, or gifted, or capable of doing great things, or being highly developed spiritually. And since we don’t *expect* to see this in them, we *don’t* see it in them (that was the theme of my sermon *last* week). The same dynamic occurs when we *think* we know what a **group** of people – like clergy, immigrants, or members of “the other” political party – are capable or incapable of.

The hometown crowd in today’s Gospel *looked* for a carpenter, and that’s what they got. They *saw* a spiritually power*less* person, and that’s what they got – “Jesus could do no deeds of power there”. One commentator writes, “Strange how hardened hearts can cut even God off at the pass.”<sup>2</sup>

Let’s be honest: We all have a tendency to label and judge other people, putting them in boxes and lopping off any part of them that doesn’t fit in that box we have created for them. We do this both with individuals we know well (or *think* we know well) **and** with individuals and groups of people whom we may never have met, yet *think* we know simply because we have characterized and labeled them so clearly in our minds. When we label people and put them in boxes, we limit their capabilities and potentials, and fail to see their True Selves, who they are in God, underneath the exterior appearance. The whole purpose of the Enneagram, which we began to study in our Adult Forum today, is to show us the personality armor that we tend to identify with and hide our True Selves behind.

My friends, to *not* acknowledge that each human being has the image of God at their center, expressed in a uniquely beautiful (though perhaps hidden) way, is to not have faith. In our baptismal vows, we have promised to “seek and serve Christ in all persons.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus’ townspeople fail to see the Christ in him, and thereby render him powerless to affect them.

There is a second dynamic at work in the story of Jesus’ encounter with his hometown folk. It has to do with what the story implies about how God works *in cooperation with us*: Without our cooperation, God’s work can be blocked. Jesus himself could do no great deed of power because of the unbelief and lack of cooperation of the people in his healing and reconciling work.

And maybe this is one of the things that frightens the people: In their unconscious minds, they know that if Jesus, who is one of them, can do great deeds of power and healing, then they, too, have that capacity – and it scares them to death! If Jesus is special, maybe they – we! – have a high calling, also? Maybe if we had faith the size of a mustard seed, we could indeed move mountains?<sup>4</sup>

Author Marianne Williamson famously wrote: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant... talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. ...We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in *some* of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine [which is what Jesus told us to do!], we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”<sup>5</sup>

My friends, this Gospel passage should give us encouragement. For if Jesus did not seem to his hometown folk to be a likely agent of God, neither do you or I seem to be likely agents of God’s redemptive work. Yet we serve a God who has a history of accomplishing amazing things through unconventional, unlikely, unexpected servants like Abraham the liar, Moses the murderer, David the adulterer, Mary the teenage mother, Peter the denier of Jesus, Paul the persecutor of Christians. God called and worked through them all.

A final word about the *second* half of today’s Gospel reading. Jesus has just failed and been rejected by his hometown folk. And in the aftermath of this failure and rejection, he sends out his disciples two by two, giving them authority over the unclean spirits. It is as if he is telling them, “You have just seen me fail and be rejected. You, too, can expect the same as you spread the kingdom of God. Do not let it weigh you down! Go, and when someone rejects you, shake the dust off your feet and move on.”

Can you and I do the same when *we* are rejected or have our egos hurt? Rather than retaliate or get depressed or angry, can we shake the dust off our feet and get on with the mission of spreading God’s life, love, and kingdom in our world?

And notice how the disciples are to pack for their journey. They are to take nothing except a staff; no food, no suitcase or backpack, no money or credit cards. Just the sandals on their feet and the clothes on their back. “Without bread, bag, and money,” writes Fr. John Shea, “they become part of those in need. Their lack of provisions elicits [from others] the compassion that is the cornerstone of the new community. Welcoming the disciples is the first step toward welcoming those whom the disciples welcome—the ones excluded because of their illnesses. Hospitality is an essential part of kingdom living.”

And their lack of money and provisions also underscores the fact that it is not them or their own resources that heals people or spreads the kingdom; it is the Spirit of God working through their weaknesses, openness, and ordinariness.

And Christ longs to work through our own fallible, vulnerable, ordinary lives, also.

AMEN

*Footnotes:*

1. Not his real name...
2. "Miracle worker: Mark 6:1-6," by Jim Callahan, *Christian Century*, June 21, 2000
3. *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305
4. Matthew 17:20
5. Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"*