

SUNDAY, JULY 4, 2021
PENTECOST 6
MARK 6:1-13

THEY SAY YOU CAN'T EVER REALLY GO HOME AGAIN – AND PERHAPS IT'S TRUE – YOU KNOW WHERE THE PHRASE COMES FROM? IT'S FROM A 1940'S NOVEL CALLED "YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN" AND IT'S ABOUT A WRITER WHO PUBLISHES A STORY ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF HIS HOMETOWN – THE BOOK IS A NATIONAL SUCCESS, BUT THE RESIDENTS OF THE TOWN, UNHAPPY WITH WHAT THEY SEE AS A DISTORTED DEPICTION OF THEMSELVES, SEND THE WRITER MENACING LETTERS AND EVEN DEATH THREATS.

JESUS' HOMECOMING WAS EVERY BIT AS TROUBLING. HAVING ACHIEVED FAME AS A PREACHER AND HEALER IN AND AROUND CAPERNAUM, JESUS RETURNS TO NAZARETH TO PREACH IN THE SYNAGOGUE WHERE HE GREW UP. THE REACTION,, ACCORDING TO MARK, IS STRONG – "THEY TOOK OFFENSE AT HIM."

AND HERE'S THE QUESTION? WHY? WHY DO YOU THINK THERE WAS SUCH DISDAIN FROM JESUS' NEIGHBORS AND HOMETOWN FRIENDS? DOES FAMILIARITY REALLY BREED CONTEMPT? OR IS IT THAT WE HAVE SUCH A DIFFICULT TIME RECEIVING GRACE FROM ONE WE KNOW SO WELL?

HERE'S THE PROBLEM – JESUS WASN'T WHAT THEY EXPECTED A PROPHET, LET ALONE A MESSIAH TO LOOK LIKE OR BE. AND TO ACCEPT HIM AS SUCH WAS TO CALL INTO QUESTION MUCH OF WHAT THEY THOUGHT THEY KNEW ABOUT THE WORLD AND PEOPLE AND EVEN THEMSELVES.

ONE OF THE THINGS WE KNOW ABOUT THAT TIME IS THAT UNLIKE TODAY, NO ONE RESPONDED TO JESUS MODERATELY. NO ONE IN NAZARETH SAID, " I LIKE HIM WELL ENOUGH TO BASE MY LIFE ON. HE'S OK."

WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THEY EITHER WANTED TO RUN FROM HIM, KILL HIM, OR WORSHIP HIM. THERE WAS NO IN BETWEEN.

WHY? BECAUSE JESUS REJECTED THE RULING IDEAL OF EVERY CULTURE. HERE'S WHAT I MEAN.

IN AMERICA, THE RULING IDEAL IS ALL ABOUT INDIVIDUAL CHOICE – ESPECIALLY TODAY. IT’S ABOUT WHAT FEELS GOOD AND RIGHT FOR ME AND MINE . SELF SACRIFICE IS A FOREIGN NOTION.

IN MORE TRADITIONAL CULTURES, IT’S LOYALTY TO THE TRIBE, OR STRICT MORALISM, WITH RULES UPON RULES.

SO, THEY TOOK OFFENSE. NO SURPRISE THERE. A NON-OFFENSIVE JESUS WOULD BE AN IMPERSONAL ONE. A SAFE ONE. YOU DON’T HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMEONE UNLESS THEY CAN CHALLENGE YOUR BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES AND CONTRADICT YOUR ASSUMPTIONS AS NECESSARY. IT’S NOT A REAL RELATIONSHIP IF YOUR SPOUSE OR FRIEND OR CO-WORKER ALWAYS AGREES WITH YOU AND NEVER SAYS “NO”.

NO WONDER JESUS OFFENDS THEM – HE CHALLENGES THE RULING IDEAL OF INDIVIDUAL HEARTS AND ENTIRE CULTURES BECAUSE HE WANTS TO BE THE RULING IDEAL.

OFFENSIVE

AND SO RATHER THAN REVISE THEIR IDEALS, THEY DISMISS HIM. THEY CALL HIM NAMES –

“ISN’T HE A CARPENTER?” SOMEONE ASKS.
IT’S A WAY OF PUTTING JESUS IN HIS PLACE.
HE’S A COMMON LABORER WITH DIRT UNDER
HIS FINGERNAILS. PROBABLY LIVES HAND TO MOUTH,
MAYBE JUST A PAYCHECK OR TWO AWAY FROM FORECLOSURE.
“WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS, ANYWAY?”

THEY’RE OFFENDED BY HIS ORDINARINESS.
SOMEBODY ELSE SAYS, “YEAH, HE’S MARY’S SON.”
IN JESUS’ DAY, NO ONE WOULD EVER SAY,
“MARY’S SON.”

LINEAGE AND INHERITANCE WERE DETERMINED BY THE FATHER,

AND THE FACT THAT JOSEPH IS NEVER MENTIONED HERE IS REALLY A WAY TO SAY,

“YOUR MAMA WAS PREGNANT OUT OF WEDLOCK, BOY.”

THEY DON'T HAVE TO COME OUT AND CALL HIM AN

“ILLEGITIMATE BASTARD.” THE IMPLICATION IS CLEAR.

“WHY I USED TO WATCH HIM FOR MARY SOMETIMES.”

“I CHANGED HIS (WHATEVER THEY HAD BACK THEN).” “I WIPED HIS NOSE.”

IT'S TEMPTING, ISN'T IT, WHEN OUR EXPECTATIONS GET THREATENED, TO REDUCE THE ONE WHO CHALLENGES THEM TO A SINGLE ATTRIBUTE – IN THE CASE OF JESUS, THEY ALL BUT CALL HIM ILLIGETIMATE – WE ALL CALL NAMES – BASED ON SKIN COLOR, OR BIRTHRIGHT, OR AGE, OR ORIENTATION, AND WE JUSTIFY DOING SO BY OUR OWN SELF-RIGHTOEUS LIVING.

AND IF YOU THINK JESUS' ORDINARINESS OFFENDS THEM, WELL – HIS MESSAGE OFFENDS THEM EVEN MORE.

“A PROPHET IS NOT WITHOUT HONOR,” JESUS INSISTS,
EXCEPT IN HIS HOMETOWN, AMONG HIS OWN PEOPLE.”

MARK SEEMS TO SUGGEST HERE THAT THE RECEPTION JESUS GETS AFFECTS HIS ABILITY TO WORK TO REVEAL THE KINGDOM OF GOD THROUGH WHAT HE CALLS “DEEDS OF POWER”. IN OTHER WORDS THERE WAS A BASIC POWER OUTAGE WHERE JESUS WAS CONCERNED.

IT'S TROUBLING, BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN SCHOOLED TO THINK-AND DEFEND – AND COUNT ON THE FACT THAT – GOD DOESN'T NEED US, THAT GOD ISN'T INHIBITED BY OUR FAITH OR LACK OF, THAT INDEED, WHAT I BELIEVE OR THINK OR DO DOESN'T MATTER EVEN A LITTLE BIT WHEN IT COMES TO GOD ACCOMPLISHING HIS PURPOSES.

AFTER ALL, ISN'T THAT ONE OF THE CENTRAL ELEMENTS OF OUR DOCTRINE OF “JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH”, PRECISELY THAT IT'S ALL UP TO GOD? GOD IS THE ONE WHO JUSTIFIES, IT'S BY GRACE, NOT BY OUR WORK, OUR FAITH IS AN AWARENESS OF AND TRUST IN WHAT GOD HAS DONE, RIGHT??

ALL TRUE – BUT –

WHAT IF, WHAT'S AT STAKE ISN'T A MATTER OF SALVATION, BUT THAT WE ACTUALLY HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN THE MANIFESTATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD HERE ON EARTH? HEH? IT'S ABOUT THE ROLE YOU AND I ARE INVITED TO PLAY IN MAKING KNOWN GOD'S WILL AND WORK IN THE WORLD.

IN THE WAKE OF SUCH REJECTION, THEN AND NOW, JESUS SENDS HIS DISCIPLES OUT TO DO THE VERY MINISTRY THAT HE HIMSELF HAS BEEN DOING.

NOTICE THAT JESUS DIDN'T WAIT FOR THE NEARBY VILLAGERS TO COME TO HIM... HE LEFT NAZARETH AND WENT TO THEM!

THAT'S IMPORTANT. IN CHRISTIAN CIRCLES,
WE TALK A LOT ABOUT "GETTING PEOPLE TO COME TO OUR CHURCH."

BUT WE DON'T TALK NEARLY ENOUGH ABOUT GETTING OUR CHURCH TO GO TO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE.

JESUS DOESN'T SAY, "WAIT HERE IN THE SANCTUARY AND
PRAY FOR PEOPLE TO COME IN AND FILL THE PEWS.

HE DOESN'T SAY, "TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHAT PEOPLE WANT AND
WHAT WILL ATTRACT THEM AND THEN DO THAT."

HE'S SAYING, "I WANT THE PEOPLE IN THE PEWS TO GO TO THEM!"

IN VERSES 7-13, HE PREPARES US TO LIVE IN A CLIMATE OF REJECTION. IN FACT, THIS PASSAGE IS SANDWICHED IN BETWEEN JESUS' REJECTION AT NAZARETH, AND THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

SURELY, SOME PEOPLE WILL TAKE OFFENSE AT YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST. AND HOW WILL YOU HANDLE THAT WHEN IT HAPPENS?

YOU HAVE TO SEE CHRIST'S REJECTION ON THE CROSS AS YOUR ACCEPTANCE BY GOD. THAT'S THE FIRST THING.

AND THEN IT GETS MORE PRACTICAL. IN V 7-13...

1. HE SENDS THE DISCIPLES OUT IN TEAMS OF 2
BECAUSE HE DOESN'T WANT US TO GO IT ALONE.

I'M SO GLAD I MET MY HUSBAND WHEN I DID. SOMEHOW GOD KNEW THAT IN THE COURSE OF DOING HIS WORK, I WOULD NEED ENCOURAGEMENT AND HELP.

THAT'S WHY GOD HAS GIVEN US EACH OTHER. THAT'S WHY OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP IS SO IMPORTANT. WHY GATHERING TO STUDY AND PRAY IS CRUCIAL.

2. LIVE SIMPLY. TRAVEL LIGHTLY.

NOTICE THAT INSTEAD OF GIVING THE DISCIPLES A LIST OF THINGS TO PACK, HE GIVES THEM A LIST OF THINGS NOT TO PACK...

THAT'S SIGNIFICANT, BECAUSE WHAT DEFINES OUR SOCIETY IS THE ACCUMULATION OF "STUFF." SOME OF IT IS NECESSARY, OF COURSE. BUT OUR CULTURE IS DEFINED BY EXCESS.

AND CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE PEOPLE WHO ARE NO LONGER TAKEN IN BY STATUS, GLITZ, AND POWER.

TAKE NO MONEY, NO BREAD,
NO BAG, NO EXTRA CLOTHES.

WHY? BECAUSE WE'RE TO RELY ON GOD'S PROVISION, RATHER THAN OUR OWN RESOURCEFULNESS.

THAT IS THE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL.

THAT IS THE VERY DEFINITION OF FAITH.

SOME FIND IT OFFENSIVE. ARE YOU OFFENDED YET?

BUT IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO BE TRULY FREE.
NOT ONLY FREE FROM FEAR.
BUT FREE FOR GOD'S PURPOSE.

FREE TO SERVE. FREE TO RISK. FREE TO LOVE
AS JESUS DID.

SO THE QUESTION BECOMES THIS – DO WE GO OUT, OR DO WE RESIST GOD'S ACTIVITY IN OUR LIVES? ARE THERE WAYS, SUBTLE THOUGH THEY BE, THAT WE SAY NO TO GOD BY SIMPLY NOT SHOWING UP, OR IN BLATANT WAYS BY OUR REFUSAL TO BE ACTIVE, ENGAGING, PARTICIPATING DISCIPLES?

SIMILARLY, ARE THERE STILL BEHAVIORS THAT HAMPER GOD'S ACTIVITY IN OUR LIVES – REGRETS WE CAN'T GET OVER, GRUDGES WE CAN'T LET GO, HURTS WE ALLOW TO DEFINE US, ADDICTIONS WE ALLOW TO IMPRISON US, ANGER THAT HAS TAKEN HOLD OF US, BEHAVIORS THAT WE ARE FAILING TO ENTRUST TO GOD?

IN THE SAME WAY, IS THERE SOME OPPORTUNITY GOD MAY BE INVITING US TO OR SOME CHALLENGE GOD MAY BE SETTING FOR US THAT WE FIND DIFFICULT TO EMBRACE OR ACCEPT OR WE SIMPLY FLAT OUT REFUSE?

PLEASE HEAR LOUD AND CLEAR – THESE QUESTIONS AREN'T ABOUT THE QUALITY OF OUR SALVATION, BUT RATHER ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE.

WHAT MATTERS, AS ALWAYS, IS HOW WE RECEIVE JESUS – HE'S SPEAKING TO US LOUD AND CLEAR IN SO MANY WAYS.

THE POWER OUTAGE HE EXPERIENCED IN HIS HOMETOWN HAD LITTLE TO DO WITH HIM AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THOSE WHO SIMPLY REFUSED TO RESPOND TO WHAT HE HAS TO OFFER.

LET THOSE WHO HAVE EARS TO HEAR – LISTEN. LEST WE BE LEFT IN THE DARK.
AMEN.