

7 after Pentecost 2024 cycle B Mark 6: 1-13

Lucy Carlton, a 90 year old proper Bostonian, graciously shared one of her rooms with me when I was a struggling musician many years ago. She would sit up straight, perse her lips and close her eyes whenever the subject of weekly communion would come up, *Familiarity breeds contempt*. In this context she was afraid folks would grow to lose the reverence and even grow to resent the sacred meal, if they received communion too often. (It did make the worship service longer, you know.)

In the first verses of our gospel reading today, *familiarity breeds contempt* fits the attitude of the hometown where Jesus returned. Jesus was familiar, or at least the folks thought so. They probably remembered his antics as a young boy, or even wiped his runny nose. They must have heard about his healings and teachings around the Galilee, though, because their first words were astonishment. *Where did this man get this?*

As he stepped into the synagogue of his youth to teach, things quickly took a turn. A carpenter? Our boy, Jesus? Not the usual prerequisite for a wise man. And their familiar Jesus, bringing about healing, and controlling the winds and the seas? Some of their comments turned into contempt. Wait a minute, *Isn't this Mary's son?* Not mentioning a father would have added to their attempts to discredit

Jesus, to create a scandal. *They took offense at him* can also be translated as *they were scandalized by*. They were not able to see beyond their expectation of him.

In the last couple weeks we heard that the woman, bleeding for 12 years, knew who Jesus was. The leader of the synagogue, Jairus, with a 12 year old daughter, knew Jesus' power. Even the demons sent into pigs who ran down the hill and drowned addressed Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. But, in his hometown? *Familiarity breeds contempt*.

Jesus' healing acts do not require our faith, as Pr. Caitlin preached last week. But since his hometown didn't expect anything from him, they could not enjoy the benefits of his deeds. This crippled his very human, but divine power. The other gospel writers softened this portion of the reading, *stating he could not do many deeds*. Mark even back tracked a bit. Perhaps this story was intended to contrast the results of the town's people's disbelief with the possibilities for his new disciples. Jesus knew his mission would be rejected by many. The disciples needed to hear this too.

Because in the next paragraph, Jesus sent his disciples into the villages. He would not let rejection deter him or them. There was teaching to do, people to care for, repentance to be proclaimed, loved to be shared. The 12 disciples were given the authority of Jesus to drive out demons, anoint sick people with oil, and heal them. They didn't go out individually, but two by two. They went with a message

that modeled community. They had traveling companions, but also held each other accountable to their message, God's message, known through the life of Jesus.

Along the way they were to pack lightly. No second carry on bags for the disciples. It seems ridiculous for us to see their empty suitcases for their travels. But Jesus' point was that what's needed to witness to the healing, restoring, reconciling love of God is not what we think we need to pack. As an intern chaplain during seminary training, I worked at a hospital in Wichita, KS. Each day I would write down my list of patients to visit, their diagnoses, and a few thoughts I might take into the visit. My intern jacket pockets were filled with my Bible on one side and my prayer book on the other, and notes hanging over the edges of my pockets. I was prepared. Thankfully, the supervisor had experience with students like me. He asked to see all that I had prepared for my visits. And then said, "Ok, now take off the jacket, and do not take any of the materials you have stuffed in your pockets. Go into their rooms and be the message." But, but, but....what if I don't say the right words? What if I don't remember how to pray? What if they reject me? I won't have anything to hold onto. His requirement was probably my biggest learning of the summer.

We can not plan for others' response to our witness. The prophet, Ezekiel must have heard my supervisor's remarks. God commissioned Ezekiel to go to the people who were a rebellious house. God told Ezekiel, *whether they hear or refuse*

to hear, you are to speak my words to them. Ezekiel was not responsible for softening their stubborn hearts, Ezekiel was to speak. God was in charge of the converting, the saving, the redeeming.

So, too, for Jesus' disciples, which include us. Because God does the calling, empowering, and enlightening us with gifts, we can be assured that God is in charge of God's business. That's good news for us. We are given Jesus' authority to teach and heal. But we don't have to do the hard work of converting others. As disciples, our call is to tell the story along our journeys. The old, old story, of Jesus and his love. Telling the story sometimes uses words, sometimes is seen in our actions.

The disciples' lives became the message. How we have known the love of God is all we need to go and tell. No seminary degree, no prestige, no amount of personal possessions can change the message we are sent to proclaim. That message does include repentance. And that is hard for us, for others to hear. But we have the promise through Jesus, that are sins do not define us. And so we do not need to fear judgement. We come each week to confess our sins and rejoice in the forgiveness we hear. And then, we are sent out again in our ministry. Not everyone we meet will respond to Jesus' message.

Will we encounter rejection? Absolutely. But Jesus also reminded the disciples, and us, we can't ram the gospel down people's throats. *If any place will*

not welcome you, leave that place. Don't dwell on those who reject God. This is God's work. And sometimes our hands, or voices, or good intentions are not what people want to hear.

But, you know what, there are so many others who are longing, dying to hear about a God who loves the whole world, our God who loves us even we are the rejecters, the God who persists in reconciling, liberating all of creation. How about the woman who asks what that cross on your neck stands for. Or a little girl who walks down the aisle after a concert and asks why that cross is at the center of the room. Or, you can fill in the blanks.

Jesus didn't ask the 12 disciples to wait til the villagers came to the disciples' houses. Disciples are to go into the villages, to the baseball bleachers, the work places, our families, to where God's people are. Some days, that may mean someone walks into our office or back yard, and other times we will go into their office or backyard. We all have had encounters with someone who in some way gave us an occasion to talk about Jesus. I remember listening to one of my teenage nieces say quietly and calmly over the phone to one of her hurting friends, *you know, a Bible passage that gets me through hard times is...*

Some folks find it helpful to keep one word in their pocket or purse to help in those 60 second encounters when someone asks who Jesus is. When we are asked that question, we also are being asked, since I follow Jesus, who am I? As

people of faith, we spend our whole lives learning what it means to be a follower, a spokesperson for Jesus. And because the Holy Spirit does her work, we will be nudged, guided and gifted to consider that question in our lives. Our lives- parables that describe the kingdom of God. Our witness doesn't necessarily happen in flashy ways or with the baggage we think we must carry. But when we determine a family budget, when we choose how and where to go on vacation, how we interact with creation, how we disagree with our neighbors. When we say we are followers of Jesus, others will look to us, to our lives, to see what that means.

When we become part of the community of Christ, doing God's work, we are given all we need to sing the song, to tell the story, to be a prophet or disciple. This meal of other gathered followers of Jesus sustains us all who are sent out on journeys into the villages of the world. And Jesus is always the song we sing. Who will hear your song this week?