

Reflection for Pentecost 7 Year B

Mark 6:1-13

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From Rejection to Sending Out the Twelve

We all know the saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." Or, to put it another way, we tend to value things that are unknown, mysterious, or rare. Take, for example, all the attention we give to a solar eclipse. This past April 8th was the event of the year in Eastern Ontario. So much hype, anticipation and daily publicity, where to watch for optimum viewing locations in the path of the totality, how to watch the eclipse safely. Yet, it was disappointing here with the cloud cover obscuring much of the almost four minutes. Personally, I think sunsets are far more beautiful than an eclipse, but we can view sunsets every day, while eclipses occur infrequently. And so we value them for their rarity.

There is something similar going on in the reception Jesus receives in his hometown, the first time he has returned since beginning his ministry. (based on introduction Daily Bread, David Lose, 2012) His successes in nearby synagogues like Capernaum and his miraculous healings have preceded his arrival.

The people seem amazed by what he says and what he does, but they are also offended. He is not a rabbi; most likely, not even trained by one. The people know him well; after all, the first thirty years of his life has been spent among them; they don't consider him to be special, - the son of a carpenter, the son of Mary. They do not expect him, a mere tradesman, to be skilled in the interpretation of the scriptures. He is too ordinary! A son is supposed to follow in his father's footsteps, to become a carpenter and nothing more.

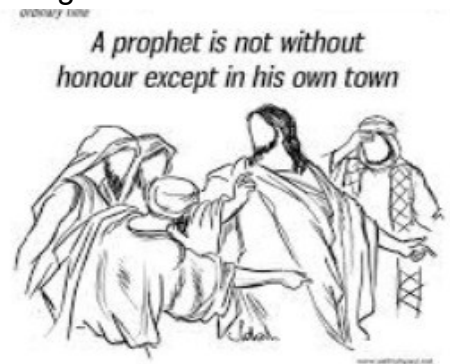
What they failed to see was that Jesus was following in his father's footsteps ~ his heavenly father's. He experienced firsthand how familiarity can breed contempt. But rather than accept His message, they refused to believe in Him. Thus, Jesus told them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." (v 4) A more straightforward wording would be "A prophet is honoured everywhere except in his own hometown and among his own family." Familiarity can cloud our ability to see what God is up to.

Jesus was shocked at their unbelief, and because of their lack of faith, he could not help those who had no faith in him, and this absence of faith challenged Jesus' ability to perform healing miracles. (sermonsfrommyheart.blogspot.com)

And what did Jesus do? We now come to the second part of our Gospel passage: Because he was rejected by his own people, Jesus adopted another strategy to continue his ministry.

Up until this point, the disciples had been followers; now Jesus was preparing them for their own ministry. Their mission was to bring the Gospel message into households. Jewish custom at that time was to offer hospitality to travellers.

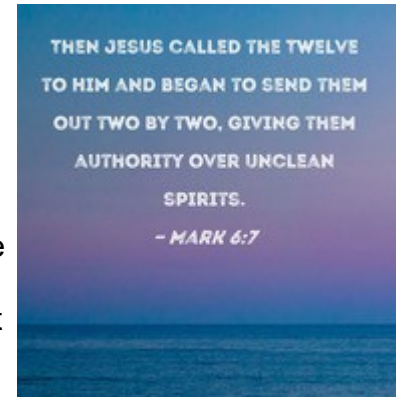
Jesus wanted the disciples to stay at the first house that offered them a place to stay in each city or town that they visited, rather than moving from house to house.



Why households? According to Prof. Emerson Powery, "This was not unanticipated, in light of Jesus' own successful activity in the homes surrounding Galilee. In this narrative, Jesus' message and activity in the synagogues had been growing less impressive as the story went on, including the latest rejection in the first part of our Gospel reading. Synagogues, with established religious traditions and authorities, were not always [open] to new ideas and activities that may have represented a new move of God! So, Jesus prepared his disciples for potential rejection." (Commentary July 8, 2012, workingpreacher.org)

Jesus sent out his disciples in pairs, with no provisions for the journey. They were to live completely dependent on the grace and hospitality of others. They were not to be held back by those who were unwelcoming. They were not sent out to convert people to Christianity; rather, they were Jews inviting other Jews to see God in a new way. He instructed them to move on if a house did not welcome them and refuse to listen to their message, telling them that as they left to "shake off the dust that [was] on [their] feet as a testimony against them." (v11).

(M. Salmon, A Challenging Journey, workingpreacher.org)



Today we also use a similar idiom ~ "Washing my hands of the situation" ~ but I also discovered that "shaking the dust off" was quite literal. According to Dr. Mark Woolmer, lecturer at Durham University, and Ancient Cultures consultant Arkan Amin Zaki Al-Amin, the phrase means as follows: "This is an ancient way still used today to "discard" a relationship or task. Shaking your feet or the lower part of your robes to shake off the dust stirred up by your feet... I am finished with you and am leaving. Furthermore, as I leave, I take nothing from this house, not even its dust!"

By shaking the dust from their feet, the Twelve would show that Jews who reject Jesus' gospel are as lost as the Gentiles who do not know God at all. (bibleref.com)

And why were they sent out in pairs? Jesus made sure that they could be there for each other, for companionship and protection. Sending "two by two" provided double witness, (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15) that when two people communicated, their message was trustworthy and reliable.

Jesus sent them as his ambassadors: to represent him, to serve him, and with his authority and his blessing. The twelve were successful in their first attempt at casting out demons, curing the sick with anointed oil, and proclaiming the good news.

The disciples were not great men, but they accomplished great things in Christ's name. And two thousand years later we are asked to continue their mission.

There is a story about two missionaries who were going door to door. They knocked on the door of one woman who was not happy to see them. She told them in no uncertain terms that she did not want to hear their message and slammed the door in their faces. To her surprise, however, the door did not close but bounced back open. She tried again, really putting her back into it and slammed the door again with the same amazing results!

Convinced that one of the missionaries was sticking his foot in the door, she reared back to give it a third slam. She felt this would really teach them a lesson. But before she could act, one of them stopped her and politely said, "Ma'am, before you do that again, you really

should move your cat". (sermonsfrommyheartblogspot, 2012)

God's invitation for us to go and make disciples isn't necessarily an invitation to go door to door inviting people to become Christians. The disciple-making process should be a part of our daily lives and daily routines because we ourselves are disciples of Christ.

An Angus Reid survey completed in 2017 showed religion was still important to Canadians, despite declining church attendance across Canada...21% of Canadians...[were] religiously committed. They [were] slightly older, more likely to be women than men... [but] what's really interesting, there's another 30% of Canadians that [were] privately faithful. They [weren't] going to church, but they believe[d] in God. They believe[d] in an afterlife. They believe[d] that there [was] an active God. If they pray[ed], somehow their prayers [would] be heard...the study also revealed that those who [were] more religiously inclined reported more community engagement and satisfaction.

(CBC News · Posted: May 02, 2017, but adapted in [] to reflect past tense) *

The most effective form of faith is the way we live our lives and the example we set as Christians. People judge the message of Jesus by the life of the messengers more than by the words they speak. The late Brazilian bishop, Dom Helder Camara, used to tell his student missionaries, "Sisters and brothers, watch how you live. Your lives may be the only gospel your listeners will ever read." (sacredspace.ie)

Amen.

*Further Reading: The article (with link below) builds on previous research on faith in Canada conducted in partnership with the Angus Reid Institute and explores the role of faith in Canadians' lives and their relationships to faith communities and public life since 2017.

Published in November 2022

"The Shifting Landscape of Faith in Canada"

<https://www.cardus.ca/research/faith-communities/reports/the-shifting-landscape-of-faith-in-canada/>

Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila

Christ has no body now but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good.
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands.
Yours are the feet.
Yours are the eyes.
You are His body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

