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Mark 6:1-13; Ezekiel 2:1-5

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***Ezekiel 2:1-5***

***He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. 2And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. 3He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. 4The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord God.” 5Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.***

***Mark 6:1-13***

***He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2On 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! 3Is 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. 4Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” 5And he*** ***could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6And he was amazed at their unbelief.***

***Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11If 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.” 12So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent.******13They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.***

There’s a game I have played with groups before that goes like this. Everyone writes on a scrap of paper, something about themselves that they think everyone else doesn’t know, and wouldn’t mind if people did! People write things like, “I’ve never had a credit card.” “I have never parallel parked.” “I have ancestors among the first arrivals at Ellis Island.” “I have a yo-yo collection.” All of the scraps of paper are put in a basket, mixed up, and then one-by-one, someone takes one of them out and reads it aloud so that the group can guess who wrote it. If you’ve never told someone about your yo-yo collection, well then, now everyone knows something interesting about you!

I would love to play that game with everyone at Bethany. You might think that the hard part would be writing something about yourself that anyone in this group of people who have known each other for so many years, doesn’t already know. Maybe. But what an invitation to a deeper understanding of someone that would be.

Our text today shows us that the people of Nazareth wouldn’t have liked that game. After being away for some time, Jesus ***“the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and his sisters”*** comes back to town and preaches in the synagogue. The people who knew him were astounded. They wonder where this wisdom has come from. Where did he get the power to do the things being done by his hands? They are not interested in learning something new about this person they thought they already knew. They don’t want to know about his yo-yo collection. Even though they wonder about his wisdom, and they wonder about his power, Mark tells us, “They took offense at him.”

This same questioning of Jesus is told by the gospel writer Luke, in another setting that may be familiar to you. In the Luke account, Jesus reads words of the prophet Isaiah telling of the coming Messiah. Jesus then says that the words of Isaiah have been fulfilled in their hearing. The people in the synagogue ask the same question, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” When Jesus refuses to work his magic there in front of them, because it’s not magic, the temple authorities become angry and run Jesus out of town to hurl him off the cliff.

Commentator Matthew Skinner writes about today’s account from Mark, “We’re witnessing more than confusion or hurt feelings. Jesus’ former neighbors to not deny that he does and says amazing things. The “offense” they take entails rejection or disengagement.”

Rejection. Disengagement. Both of those words imply a previously good or neutral circumstance or relationship. You can’t be rejected if you’ve never been known. You can’t disengage if you’ve never engaged. Having known Jesus, and having previously engaged with him, Jesus’ former neighbors take offense – they reject and disengage.

In Nazareth, this disengagement resulted in Jesus being limited in his engagement with them. Without engagement, the *shared nature* of the good news was not possible. Jesus “***could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.”***

This hometown rejection scene comes early on in both gospel accounts. And in both scenes, Jesus next move is to call the twelve and send them out two by two. Because being rejected and ignored was not something that would put a stop to Jesus’ mission. That same commentator, Matthew Skinner wrote about this passage, “Opposition to the reign of God takes a toll and has lasting consequences, but it never has the last word.”

He called the twelve, and began to send them out two by two with explicit power, and specific instructions. Jesus gave them authority over unclean spirits. That was the power. Jesus also asked them to model simplicity by giving them instructions on how to travel in and out of various places. First, model dependency on God by bringing nothing for the journey except a staff. No bread, no bag, no money – only one tunic, and sandals. Second, model humility – only go to one house – don’t act as if you are working your way up to the best house and family in the village, looking for the most comfort, the best food, the best accommodations, and status.

“They are guests, humbly willing to commit themselves to the well-being of the people they encounter, where those folks reside.” (Skinner) And third, Jesus instructs the disciples on how to leave the place.

I find this very interesting. Not only does Jesus not tell them to go in with bravado and gusto, putting the fear of God, so to speak, into people. He instructs them to go out with the same humility. There is no shame or weakness or lack of skills implied in the disciples message if they are not heard by their audience. Just let it go, Jesus says. Literally, shake the dust off of your sandals. What a great piece of self-care. Don’t take anything of that encounter with you as you go, even the dust of it remains behind. Don’t take down their name and come back later with revenge, don’t harm them, don’t speak ill of them, don’t send the goon squad after them. Because Jesus knows that God’s mission will be accomplished everywhere, by someone, at some time that only God knows. It’s interesting that this text comes after Jesus has been telling parables about planting seeds and not knowing when they’ll produce fruit, or if they’ll produce fruit. I also like that the disciples were sent out in pairs. From the start, Jesus sends them in community.

Then, in contrast to Jesus’ few healings in Nazareth, the disciples “***cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.”***

It’s heartbreaking that Jesus was met with rejection in Nazareth. Jesus’ neighbors could not accept a Jesus unlike the one they knew. Think how much more he could have done, for his own family, for his own community, but they rejected him, and his work was blocked by that rejection. I wonder if our own disbelief in something unfamiliar has ever blocked the work of God in the world like that?

Think of all the times we returned to a former space, just to have any growth or change not recognized. Going back to a high school reunion where you’re still expected to be the “funny guy in the room” even though life has changed you enough that you’re not that guy any more. You try to say something meaningful and someone blows past it and makes a joke. Any personal growth we have had is missed. The youngest child still treated as a child even though all of the family at the table are now adults. Some church communities do this also. It’s one thing to reminisce about a child, now an adult, who comes back. It’s another to see them as an adult and let them be the person they have become. Then there are the adults who have always been adults while we have known them. Remember that the 80 year old that you have known for years, was maybe 50 when you first met them – or younger. That’s 30 years or more of life and personal growth to be accounted for. It would be a shame to skip over all that and miss out on someone.

Debie Thomas writes, “Something precious is lost when we fail to recognize the unfamiliar within the familiar.  When we turn away from the extraordinary within the ordinary.  We miss the presence of God in our midst.”

The unfamiliar, the extraordinary, the presence of God, often come disguised as something mundane that would never catch our attention. We need the presence of God more than anything these days. Let’s practice noticing.

Amen.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_by_Twos>

<https://www.christiancentury.org/lectionary/july-7-ordinary-14b-mark-6-1-13>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-14-2/commentary-on-mark-61-13-6>