

Weekend of Sunday, July 4, 2021
6th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 14/Proper 9/Year B
First Reading: Ezekiel 2:1-5
Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10
Gospel Reading: Mark 6:1-13
Sermon Title: “Impressed or Inspired”

Theme

At home and abroad, Jesus and his disciples encounter resistance as they seek to proclaim God’s word and relieve affliction.

Text

¹[Jesus] 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.

Sermon

Jesus' hometown was Nazareth. Today Nazareth is the Arab capital of Israel and is a city of over 77K people. In Jesus' day, it was a town of less than 2K people. By comparison, New Springfield has a population of 1577 and North Jackson has a population of about 3000, so imagine a town between those two sizes. If you are familiar with those towns *and* can imagine a much less mobile society, then you might be able to imagine that everyone in 1st century Nazareth knew everyone else. Jesus was the oldest son of Mary – unless you're Catholic, then he would be the only son of Mary, but then you're stuck trying to figure out who the mother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon and their sisters was.

On a similar note, the reason Bible scholars presume Joseph was much older than Mary is that he is never heard from again after the story of Jesus being left in Jerusalem after the Passover. Scholars believe he died sometime after that, but not before passing his trade of carpentry on to his son, Jesus – but I digress. The point is that Nazareth is a town small enough that everyone knew everyone else and their business – if you know what I mean.

What happened to Jesus between those very few stories of his youth and when he re-appeared at his baptism by John and began calling disciples is the source of much speculation. It goes like this; Jesus grew up as the firstborn son of Mary and her husband Joseph and learned the trade of carpentry from his earthly father. Sometime after that, Jesus left home, and may have joined the Essenes, a sect of Judaism that flourished between the 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE where he may have gotten enough training that people began calling him a rabbi. However, I speculate that Jesus did not see the Essenes, who were ascetic, communal, and nearly monastic, as the embodiment of the "abundant life" God his Father had sent him to preach (John 10:10). Regardless of where he had been, what scripture tells us is that at about thirty years of age, he re-appeared on the public scene, preaching that the Kingdom of God had come near.

This passage that is our Gospel Reading for today is Jesus' second visit back home to Nazareth since beginning his public ministry. His first visit was in chapter 3, according to Mark's Gospel, and that visit was controversial too. That story was the Gospel Reading back on the first weekend of June. Though he had sent his Disciples out on their first missionary journey without him, (3:13-19) when he

arrived in Nazareth, a large crowd of other second-tier disciples accompanied him (:20) and that must have been alarming to his family because Mark wrote that they, his family, tried to restrain him. And the scribes, who came down from Jerusalem, accused him of being Beelzabul, another name for Satan. So that visit, just two chapters ago, did not go well! But that seems not to have deterred him because in our Gospel Reading for today he returned. This time he came with his Disciples in tow. He went to the synagogue, as was his custom, (Luke 4:16) and he began to teach. Initially, it would appear they were impressed saying,

²"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.

Remember last week how I said that text does not emote? This text is an example of that because we might think that they were impressed, but on the contrary, they were offended. Notice that last phrase, "And they took offense at him."

So on this second visit in a very short time, Jesus was still not welcomed. They were not going to ascribe to him messianic faith and belief to a man who was one of them. They had watched him grow up. 'No sir, you are Mary's son. How dare you come among us claiming to be more than you are!'

Notice, Jesus didn't get upset. I am sure he was disappointed. Who wouldn't want to do something nice for his hometown? Mark concluded,

⁵he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.

In stark contrast to Jesus' inability to do much good in his own hometown, in the second half of the Gospel Reading, we have his Disciples out on their second missionary trip without him. Now mind you, the Disciples had only been with Jesus a short while, perhaps a year, and yet,

¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

What is going on here? I am so glad you ask.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

I don't want you to think that somehow Jesus was less powerful because he was among his own disbelieving faithless townsfolk. I think it would be wrongheaded to think that we, sinful people, can disrupt the power of God revealed in Jesus Christ. But I do think that God revealed in Jesus Christ *chooses* to work *with* people who want to work *with* him.

For example, in last week's Gospel Reading we had two cases; Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, who wanted healing for his daughter and got it through Jesus. When everyone else gave up, Jesus said, "Do not fear, only believe."

And the hemorrhaging woman who wanted healing for herself and got it through Jesus. She did not intend to attract attention to herself, but when Jesus felt the power go out from him, he told the woman, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

And in the second half of the Gospel Reading for today, the Disciples, who were relatively new in their calling and hadn't figured out who Jesus was yet, went out proclaiming "that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them."

I am certain that Jesus wanted to do good work in his own hometown. Just imagine! But whether he would have or because he didn't the result was the same. They took offense, spoke ill of him behind his back, and refused his message that was meant to bring wholeness, both physically and spiritually. And because of their own ignorance, or foolishness, or lack of humility, or discernment, they failed to see who Jesus truly was, and missed out on what could have been the greatest day of Nazareth's history.

What is the difference? An openness to the ministrations of the Holy Spirit of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

I entitled this sermon, "*Impressed or Inspired*" because this Gospel Reading points out that every person who has an encounter with Jesus has to decide for themselves whether to simply be *impressed*, as though Jesus was a magician who could

perform magic tricks but essentially leaves us unchanged. Or are we *inspired*, meaning that we are convinced by virtue of his ministry of preaching and teaching and performing signs and miracles that he has the power of the Spirit of God in him and inspires us to seek that same Spirit of God so that can do powerful ministry in his name. Like the people of Nazareth and the people of the villages his Disciples ministered to, we have a choice. Are we "*Impressed or Inspired?*"

Zion, and here I am speaking of this fellowship of members and visitors alike, let us not miss out on the abundant life Jesus came to reveal. Jesus wants it for you and for me and for all people, but like the free COVID-19 vaccine, some people just refuse the gift.

Jesus continues to do great deeds of power and gives us, his disciples, authority too! Yet none of this power is arbitrary; it must be administered through faith. Jesus asked his disciples to go out without money or supplies so that 1) they will be dependent on the Spirit of God for their wellbeing, and 2) that the people they minister to will be receptive, which is also through the Spirit of God.

When we are sent from this assembly to witness, to heal, to feed, to serve, to teach, to minister, we do so with the faith; the belief, that the Spirit always operates between Jesus and us, and between us and those to whom we are sent. We have nothing to fear, and only good work to be done in his name.

Prayer

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in our baptism you call us to proclaim the coming of your kingdom. Let us not simply be impressed by the stories we read in holy scripture, but let us be inspired to faithfully witness to your love, grace, and mercy wherever we are sent. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen