

**Weekend of Sunday, July 8, 2018**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 14/Proper 9/Year B**  
**Primary Text: Mark 6:1-13**  
**Sermon Title: “Sent Out with Faith”**

**Theme**

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

**Text**

<sup>1</sup>[Jesus] came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.<sup>2</sup>On 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! <sup>3</sup>Is 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. <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” <sup>5</sup>And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup>And he was amazed at their unbelief.

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

## Sermon

An interesting lection for this weekend. What we have are two seemingly different and unrelated stories of Jesus fairly early in his public ministry. But as we go along I will point out to you one major commonality between the two stories.

In the first part, verses 1 through 6 we have the story of Jesus returning to his hometown. As I said, this story takes place fairly early in his public ministry. He has been out and about preaching and teaching and performing signs and miracles and has already earned a reputation, and awareness of him as something extraordinary was becoming widespread.

Now every preacher has a special relationship with this story. We can all relate. My story is a little different than most. I've never preached in my hometown let alone the congregation I grew up in. They've never invited me back to do so. Hey!

I've preached at my mother's church many times, but that church was never my church. As you know, I have three brothers and a sister. My sister has heard me preach many times. My oldest brother has heard me preach once. But in 21 years, the other two have never heard me preach.

I wouldn't mind going back to my home church, where I was confirmed and where Carol and I were married. With social media being what it is, I wonder if some of my old high school classmates would show up to hear me. That would be weird. Would I be received honorably and with *the respect of the office*? Or would they remember me as the kid who ... well, no point in bringing those things up in this company.

You had the blessing of hosting the Rev. Dr. Robert Duffett last week. It was more than a couple of years into my time here before I found out who and what he is, but I wonder how he feels when he is invited back to the Mahoning Valley to preach.

It did not go so well for Jesus. Mark records that they were astounded at his wisdom, and marveled at his deeds of power. They recognized him as the son of Mary, and the brother to all his siblings who I presume still lived there in town. In their confusion they asked, "Hey, isn't that Jesus, son of Mary?" And then, it seems the more familiarized they became, the more offense they took from him.

Again as a preacher, I tell you what you need to do each week and get away with it because you only know me as your pastor. But back home people know me differently, and that probably would change how I and my message would be received.

Mark wrote that because of their disrespect and animosity toward him, Jesus and his power to heal was diminished. Mark wrote <sup>5</sup>“he could do no deed of power there, except he laid hands on a few sick people and cured them.” And then Mark added, <sup>6</sup>“And he was amazed at their unbelief.”

In the second half of this passage, Jesus moved on. It may have bothered him that he could not reach the people of his own hometown, we will never know for sure. But what we can be sure of is that he moved on. He may have lamented over those friends and neighbors, but he was focused on his own ministry, and so he could not afford to be caught up in their unbelief.

As he moved along he gathered the Twelve and he sent them out two by two. And he gave these teams “authority over the unclean spirits.” Furthermore they were not allowed to take anything with them, for they were supposed to live off the good will of those they encountered. So presumably, if they were not welcomed like he himself was not in his own hometown, they would move on. But if they were received well they were to stay and do ministry there in his name.

By the end of the passage we know that when they gathered up again the Twelve reported back that they had cast out demons and healed many sick. Wow! Can you believe it? These bumbling nub-saucers were able to do amazing things and he, the Lord, the Son of God, was not! What happened? What was the difference?

The difference between the two parts of the same passage is ... faith. The folks in Jesus' hometown could not get past who they knew him to be, and without faith in God revealed in himself, Jesus Christ, God's own son, nothing happened.

Now I have often wondered what really happened. Was Jesus and his power really stymied? Or was their lack of faith obvious to him and he simply gave up? Personally, I don't want to believe that the power of God is affected by the belief of his people, or I think we are all in big trouble! I prefer to think they could not be

satisfied by him no matter what he did, because their minds were already made up about him. He's nothing special, he's just Mary's son.

The one thing that is in common to both stories of this one passage is ... faith. Or should I say, faith and the lack of faith.

In the first story, I prefer to think that Jesus was unable to be very effective because his townsfolk were unable to receive him as God's Messiah, and the Son of God, after all, they grew up with him. They did not have faith in him.

And in the second story, the disciples were sent out with just a little instruction, but that instruction was to preach and teach and perform signs and miracles in his name, and when they did that, in faith, with people willing to have faith in the name of Jesus, amazing things happened.

Faith is the element common to both stories.

What are we supposed to do with that? I see at least three responses:

- 1) I think it's pretty clear that **faith is required for anything good to happen.** When I have faith I see things differently. I am optimistic and hopeful and that alone gives me a higher energy level. And in those rare occasions when I lack faith, I feel hopeless and out of control. I don't like that latter feeling, and I doubt you do either.
- 2) In faith, we have a partner in whatever endeavor we take on. Now the proper theological approach is more like, the disciple watches to see where God is already at work so that he or she can join God in it, but I have to admit, many times I seem to act first. But maybe that's just my ego getting in the way. Often times it works out, so maybe God is blessing what I am doing, or more likely, my inclination to do a thing was led by the Spirit all along and I just thought I was leading the way. Either way, **when we act in faith, God is with us.**
- 3) In the first story, Jesus was not very effective, and yet, it didn't seem to bother him much; at least not enough that it held him back from accomplishing his big picture goal, the salvation of the world. What we can learn here is that ministry naturally ebbs and flows. Sometimes we are effective and sometimes

we are not. The results are not up to us. The faithful disciple continues on in faith, maybe to a new town, maybe to a new ministry within the same community. **We learn, and we move on, always discerning the will of God and acting in the name of Jesus Christ.**

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

My Raisin the Bar Challenge for you this week is to be reminded of this story every time you take something on. When we get analytical about it, we can get caught up in the effectivity of the thing and lose sight of the big picture. Jesus Christ himself was not able to reach everyone, but that did not prevent him from bringing salvation to everyone.

When we do ministry in his name, we simply need to do so in his name and in faith, leave the results up to him. And remember that it is not about us, and our success. It's all about him, and oh, by the way, he already saved the world. And isn't that a relief.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that you would bless us with faith. And not just a little faith, but enough faith that we are compelled to do ministry in your name that will bring others to faith in you and bring glory to you and your Father. We pray this in your name. Amen