

DISHONOR

Mark 6:1-13

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

July 8, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The sermon this morning is based on the Gospel Lesson, although there is a common theme that runs throughout all three of the readings. It's the theme of rejection. In the Old Testament lesson we heard the call of Ezekiel, where the LORD warned him that he would likely be rejected by the house of Israel (Ezek. 2:3-4). And, indeed, Ezekiel was rejected and suffered much for the word he was sent to preach. In the epistle lesson we heard the apostle Paul boast about being insulted and persecuted (2 Cor. 12:10). And now from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 6, verses 1 through 13, we see that it even extends to our Lord himself. It is on page 711 of the pew Bible. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 6, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.

² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?" ³ 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. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, "**A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.**" ⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear saints, the world is hostile to Christianity. It is hostile to you. It is hostile to your faith. It is hostile to your Lord. It has always been this way, and it always will be, right up until the day that our Lord appears again on this earth.

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Now when I say that, I should also warn you against a persecution complex. There is a temptation sometimes, when someone disagrees with us or promotes a competing worldview, to play the persecution card. Not everyone who disagrees with us is hostile to us. And not everyone who advocates for laws that we disagree with is persecuting us. Peacefully promoting an agenda because you are convinced it is good and beneficial is not persecution. In the United States we see little, if any, actual persecution of Christians. If you want to see real persecution, you need to go somewhere like Nigeria, China, or just about anywhere in the Middle East. That's where Christians are imprisoned, beaten, or even killed, simply because of what they believe.

We don't face that kind of persecution here. But it's entirely possible that we could someday. And that's not a commentary on our society. It's more so an observation of history. Lands that were once safe for Christians—perhaps even controlled by Christians—are now hostile to Christianity. Our Lord warned us this could happen, and he himself is the prime example. His own countrymen shouted for his death, even though he had done nothing wrong. Even his hometown was against him. This is what we read in the gospel lesson. It hadn't yet risen to the level of violence. What we read about here is simple ridicule and disbelief, which was most unfortunate for them; Jesus only healed a few people there. From other passages we know this is the town of Nazareth (1:24; 10:47; 16:6).

The first two verses seem like the typical reaction Jesus would get from the common people. They generally received him with gratitude and amazement. Whenever Jesus encountered hostility, it was usually from ruling class. But the common people always seemed to be impressed by his wisdom and power. The only thing that appears different in the first two verses is that Jesus is in his hometown. Other than that it looks like business as usual.

He was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And the people say, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?" (6:2) So far, so good.

But then verse three is a turning point, and it starts to look like their astonishment in verse two comes more from disbelief than approval. They say, "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." (6:4)

They know this guy. They watched him grow up. He seemed like a well-behaved kid, but it's just hard to believe he's a mighty prophet when you know him. So they don't believe.

It seems at first glance that the sole reason they don't believe is simply because they know him. But there's really more to it. They're actually insulting Jesus, first when they call him a carpenter, and then when they call him the son of Mary.

Now there's nothing wrong with being a carpenter. But at the time it wasn't considered a very noble profession, especially in small towns like Nazareth. That's because there wasn't enough work to keep a carpenter busy in small towns, so they had become itinerant workers, taking their trade wherever the work was. This meant that carpenters would often have to leave their families at home while they disappeared for long stretches of time. This wasn't seen as a very good thing to do for your family. Now Jesus didn't have a wife and children, but he was the oldest son of Mary, and the perception may have been that he should stay home and take care of her. We don't know at this point where Joseph is. He may have died, or he might

have been on the road working, or he might have been at home. We just don't know. If he wasn't at home, the people of Nazareth might have thought that Jesus should have stayed home. So that could be part of their disrespect for him. Or they may have simply been associating him with other carpenters. Either way, their identification of Jesus as a carpenter was not done in appreciation for the trade.

And their dishonor becomes even more pronounced when they refer to Jesus as "the son of Mary." This sounds fine to us. Jesus is the son of Mary. But it was typical in the ancient world, especially among Jews, to refer to a person by his father's name, even if that father was deceased. Jesus' full legal name would have been, "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." But the people refer to him by his mother's name. Apparently they know that Jesus was conceived out of wedlock and that Joseph isn't Jesus' biological father (cf., Matt. 1:18). By omitting Joseph and referring to Jesus simply as "the son of Mary," they're insulting his birth. They're calling him an illegitimate child, and they simply cannot believe that such a child would grow up to be a mighty prophet. They know that Joseph isn't Jesus' biological father, so they assume that Mary and some other guy had a sinful encounter, and they think that's where Jesus came from. They think that they know better than the people in all those other towns. *Maybe those gullible folks in Cana, and Capernaum, and Nain are buying this whole prophet thing, but we know where this guy really came from, and we're not buying it.* They think they know the rest of the story when they really don't. They're missing, of course, the whole thing about the virgin birth. So "they took offense at him."

In Greek the word for this is σκανδαλίζω (*skandalizō*). It's apparently where we get our English word "scandal" from. The people were *scandalized* by Jesus. And I like this translation better than the one that says, "They took offense at him." For one thing, it's more literal to the original language. The verb is passive. It's not like they decided to take offense at Jesus. It's something that happened to them because of Jesus' origin. And the word "scandalize" is a bit stronger than the word "offend." The word "offend" has actually gotten kind of cheap. We use it when we're insulted by something or even when we just disagree with something. When someone says something that disagrees with our sensibilities, we say we're offended. Or when you're at a restaurant and the person in the booth next to you is cursing up a storm, we call that offensive language. And that's fine. If something bothers you, it's okay to say you're offended, because that's how we use the word. But the people at the synagogue in Nazareth were more than just bothered by something Jesus said. They weren't just put off by him. They were scandalized. The Greek word, at least, means "to cause to stumble" or even "to cause to sin." So if something scandalizes you in the biblical sense of the word, it means that it actually causes you to sin or fall into unbelief. The vulgar person in the booth next to you probably doesn't cause that kind of scandal. But in Nazareth all the stuff about Jesus being a carpenter and being conceived out of wedlock caused the people to stumble and reject him.

And it was because they knew Jesus, and they knew where he came from—or, at least, they *thought* they knew where he came from. So they stumbled over the appearance that he was an illegitimate child.

Now we might be tempted to misapply this detail to mean that there's nothing wrong with having children out of wedlock. We might also be tempted to misapply it to mean that you can't judge a book by its cover. The first is just false. Unless the child is conceived by the Holy Spirit—which has only happened once—having a child out of wedlock is always the result of someone's

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sin, but not necessarily always the mother's sin. So we shouldn't treat it like it's no big deal, but we also need some discernment to know when it is or isn't our place to judge. We need to know our place. We also need to know when to keep our mouths shut and not gossip about things that aren't our business. And if it is our place to judge, or if it is our place to at least talk to the people involved, we need to make sure we know the facts before passing judgment. We also need to be ready to speak God's forgiveness much faster than we are ready to pass judgment.

The second misapplication is actually true, that we should not judge children born out of wedlock merely because of their origin. They didn't do anything wrong. The only difference is that they might not always have the same privileges as children with both a mother and a father. But this, of course, isn't their fault. So it's true that we should not pass judgment on the kids, but it's also not the point of this text.

The point is simply the historical detail that the people who thought they knew Jesus passed judgment on him and considered him to be nothing. But, in fact, what looked like a weakness to them—being conceived and born out of wedlock—was actually the power of God—the virgin birth. They assumed it was some kind of moral deficiency, when, in fact, it was a holy and righteous miracle of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' strength appeared as weakness to them.

This is a theme that will continue with Jesus, and it is seen most clearly at the cross, where what appears to be weakness—his condemnation and death—is really the power of God—the salvation of the world. By outward appearances, Jesus was born an illegitimate child and died a felon. And this—glory to God—is how he chooses to work in this sinful and fallen world. He chooses to work through circumstances and people who appear weak and rejected.

The prime example of this, of course, is the cross. But it's also something we see in the lives of the prophets and apostles. In the Old Testament lesson this morning, we heard the call of Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:1-5). God told him beforehand that the house of Israel is a rebellious house, and they might not listen. And they didn't. Ezekiel's prophecy seemed like foolishness to them, so they didn't repent, and they were taken into captivity. By all outward appearances, Ezekiel looked like a failure. And in the midst of this, he endured much personal suffering. This was actually quite typical for the prophets.

Then in the second part of the gospel lesson—the part where Jesus sends the twelve disciples out—he has to give them instructions of what to do when they are rejected (6:11). Even though he gave them authority to cast out demons and heal the sick, they would still face rejection in many places. In many places it went really well. In other places it went poorly. This became even more pronounced after Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The apostles went out, all over the world, preaching the Gospel. Many people believed and were saved. But the apostles also faced severe opposition. The vast majority of them were arrested, beaten, and killed. Their lives were not the picture of happiness and success.

The apostle Paul spoke of this in the epistle lesson from 2 Corinthians. He was an extremely successful missionary in terms of the number of people who believed because of his preaching. But he also suffered much and faced extreme opposition. So he says, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:10) "When I am weak, then I am strong." It sounds backward, but it seems to be the way God works.

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Even today, in places where Christianity is legal and held in high regard, it's not growing very much, if at all. But in parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East—areas where Christianity is often persecuted and sometimes even illegal—that is where the Gospel is spreading. And who knows? Maybe if Christianity continues to lose credibility in the western world it will start to grow here again. It sounds odd. Our natural reaction to ridicule is to stand up for ourselves and fight against it. Our natural reaction is to try to hang on to whatever cultural influence we have left. And if we're convinced that our influence will have a positive impact on society, that's not such a bad thing. We should want to have a positive impact. But that may not be God's plan. His plan may be to manifest his strength through weakness again. If it turns out that we will endure ridicule, dishonor, shame, persecution, or even death, we should rejoice that we are counted worthy to share in the sufferings of our Lord, for it is because of his rejection and unjust execution that we are saved.

So if our lives begin to follow the pattern of the one whose name we are called by, consider his sufferings. Consider that he had a choice. Often when we suffer, we really have no say in the matter. We suffer against our will. We couldn't make it stop, even if we tried. But consider the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Being the Son of God by whom all things in heaven and on earth were created, he did have a choice. He had absolute power over those who killed him. When he was ridiculed in his hometown, he could have done something marvelous just to prove his power to them. But he didn't. His strength was hidden in weakness. It was hidden in the weakness of appearing as an illegitimate child. And on the cross it was hidden in the appearance of a felon—a criminal condemned to death. But this is the power of God, because this is how he made atonement for sins. This is how he rescued sinners out of the clutch of sin and death. It was for our sake that he suffered and died.

Then, on the third day, he was vindicated in his resurrection. And another day is coming when he will be revealed in his glory for all the world to see. And on that day, all who are called by his name and all who have suffered with him and on account of his name will also appear with him in glory. For now, dishonor, but honor and glory will come, and it's all because of the cross. Out of his suffering and shame will come glory, honor, and praise. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.