

REJECTED FOR THE WORD

Mark 6:1-13

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

July 7, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson for this Seventh Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 6, verses 1 through 13.

The sermon this is based on this gospel lesson, although there is a common theme that runs throughout all three of the readings. It's the theme of rejection, and specifically on account of the Word of God. 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 for the sake of Christ (2 Cor. 12:10). And now in this gospel lesson, we see that it even extends to our Lord himself.

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.

Hold fast to the Word of God. There are many temptations, from within and without, that would draw us away from the truth and security of God's Word. Resist them. They are from the devil. Our sinful hearts tempt us to reject God's Word. Opposition from the world around us tempts us to deny it, or at least keep quiet. But Jesus calls us to resist these temptations, and he promises that, in the end, you will be vindicated.

There comes a time in every Christian's life when we have to decide whom we will listen to. Will we listen to the Word of God? Or will the voices of the culture and our own sinful nature rule our thoughts? When you and the Word of God disagree, which is the same as to say, *When you and God disagree*, who is right? Now it's one thing to admit now that God is right. When we consider that question in the abstract, it's easy enough for us to say, "God is right." It's one thing to admit that our hearts are sinful and our minds are darkened when we're not dealing with something specific. But in the moment, it's much more difficult. In the moment when we're actually thinking something that is contrary to the Word of God, it's much more difficult to take a step back and ask, "What does God's Word say? And am I willing to submit to it?" It takes a conscious commitment to surrender to the Word of God. And, of course, that requires actually reading the Word. It's not so much in those moments, when we're thinking something contrary to the Word of God that we will remember the Word of God and test our thoughts against it. It's when we're reading the Scriptures that we will notice, *Oh, this challenges the way I usually think.*

As you read the Bible, there will be things that you do not understand, that you think are wrong, or even that you think are evil. What will you do with those things? Instead of denying them, dismissing them, or just ignoring them, accept them. Even if you don't understand yet how something can be true or good, accept it. And then keep thinking about it. Ask a Christian friend or a pastor about it. Try to figure out how it can be true and good. You will be surprised how often, when we submit to God's Word, that the Holy Spirit enlightens our hearts and minds to understand it.

Our oldest child just finished kindergarten, and he's learning to read. For kindergarten graduation, his school gave him a Bible. It's his first full Bible. So he's really excited about reading it. The night after graduation, he wanted to read it, but he didn't know where to start, so he did that thing where you just open it up and pick a spot. And he opened to Ecclesiastes, because it's close to the middle. He put his finger on chapter 7 and read verse 1. It says,

"A good name is better than fine perfume,
and the day of death better than the day of birth."

He made a disapproving look and said, "That can't be in the Bible."

I said, "Well, where did you read that from?"

He said, "The Bible. But everything in the Bible is true, and I know that's not true."

"But it's in the Bible."

"But how can the day of death be better than the day of birth?"

So I said, "Ecclesiastes was written by an old and wise king named Solomon. The book is a journey through his experience of life. He was very rich and very wise, but those things did not satisfy him. All of his money did not make him happy. And his great wisdom only made him sadder, because he saw all the foolish and evil things that other people did, and he knew they were wrong, but the people didn't know, so they kept doing those things, and it vexed Solomon's spirit to watch the people hurt themselves. You're right that birth is good and death is bad. But Solomon's life was very sad, and he was looking forward to the end of it."

Then my son had a little epiphany, and he said, "Because then he can go to heaven."

"Yeah."

And then the next night I made sure we read the end of Ecclesiastes:

“Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.
For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil” (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Not all of Solomon’s life was sad. When he learned to fear, love, and trust in God, then he knew that he could keep God’s commandments and trust him to take care of the rest.

When you read something in the Bible that doesn’t make sense, or just seems wrong, you can say so. You should. That’s better than ignoring it. Say, “This is true, even though I don’t like it, or I don’t think it’s right.” There’s a big difference between admitting that you struggle with something and outright rejecting the Word of God. Be open to learning and ask for help. But don’t hold yourself above the Bible, as if you’re the one who decides what in it is right and what is wrong. If you do that, you’re making yourself out to be God.

Beside our sinful natures and our darkened minds, we also have external pressures. 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.

There are two great powers in the world: Our God and the devil. We may not think about it much, but they are behind everything. Our God is behind everything that is true. And the devil is behind everything that is false. But do not fear the devil, because these two great powers are not equal. So there will be persecution, but our God can deliver us.

In the United States we see little actual persecution of Christians. There is some, but few of us have experienced it, and it isn’t the harshest kind yet. 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 level of persecution here. More of what we face here could be classified as “ridicule.” If you confess that God created the heavens and the earth in six days, someone will accuse you of being “anti-science,” which isn’t true at all. And then, ironically, if you say that there are only two sexes, which is very scientific, you will be called a “bigot.” And if you say that life begins at conception, which is also very scientific, you will be called “oppressive.” And if you confess that Jesus is the Son of God, who rose bodily from the grave, which is very historical, you will be called “superstitious.” And if you say anything about him returning, you will be called “fanatical.” Basically, what we have is a bunch of name-calling. How we receive this kind of ridicule is important. If you are afraid of someone calling you names, how do you think you’ll respond when they threaten violence and ask you to deny that Jesus is Lord? If you are not faithful in the little things, do not imagine that you will be faithful in the big things.

It’s entirely possible that we could face severe persecution here. And that’s not even a commentary on our society. It’s more so an observation of history. Lands that were once safe for Christians, perhaps even governed by Christians, are now hostile to Christ. Our Lord warned us this would 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. It hadn’t yet risen to the level of violence. What we read about here is simple ridicule and disbelief, which was very unfortunate for them, because Jesus only healed a few people there.

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 the ruling class. But the common people were usually 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 we see that 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 probably seemed like a well-behaved kid to them, 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 a little more to it. They insult Jesus when they call him “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. They seem to 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 assume that Mary and some other guy had a sinful encounter, and they think that’s where Jesus came from. Of course, they’re missing the whole thing about the virgin birth. So “they took offense at him.” That is, they rejected him, and they stumbled into unbelief.

But 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 would 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. This 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 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. Most 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's the way God works.

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. When we suffer, we often 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.