

## **Sermon for July 4, 2015**

“He left that place and went to his hometown.” Let’s set the stage for today’s reading. Up to this time Jesus has preached in the Temple in Jerusalem where the crowds were amazed at his authority. He’s healed many people of their diseases, cast out demons, calmed a storm at sea and raised a girl from the dead. You would think that he would be welcomed in his hometown as a hero!

He takes his disciples with him as he teaches in the synagogue and many of those who heard him were astounded. They said among themselves, “Where did he get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands?” You would think that the next words spoken would be to the effect of how glad they were that he had done well for himself. But no, they start talking about how he was the local carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon and that his sisters still are among them.

With those few sentences the entire mood changes in the synagogue. There’s also a lot of dynamics going on that the hearers of Mark’s Gospel would have noticed but that we might not. We need to know that Jesus’ society was based on honor and shame. At your birth you were allotted only so much honor because it was believed to be a fixed resource. The amount of honor you received depended on your station in life. If someone from a lower station such as a carpenter were to receive more honor; it had to come from someone else. Those who knew and studied the law received more honor than the artisans who

worked with their hands. So for Jesus to be given the honor of a great teacher it would have to come from someone else and they weren't willing to give it.

In the reading Jesus is mentioned only as Mary's son. If you've ever tried reading through all of the genealogies listed in the Bible; you'll soon learn that children are listed by their fathers—not their mothers. Two things may be going on here. First, the townspeople may be trying to take Jesus down a peg or two by bringing up the rumors that were probably going around at his birth—that Joseph really wasn't his father, that Jesus was illegitimate. Secondly, Joseph may not be mentioned because he has already died. They may be bringing up the fact that as the oldest son, Jesus should be home taking care of the family and not running around as an itinerant preacher.

In any case the people of Nazareth thought that they knew who Jesus was and how he should be acting—and it wasn't like this. In a way it reminds me of a time before I went to seminary. I had wanted to work for my home congregation. I went before the council and presented my reasons—as you can see I didn't get the job. My pastor explained it to me this way. He said that since I had been a member of the congregation my whole life I knew a lot about the people there and that was an advantage. He then told me that since I had been a member there my whole life I knew a lot about the people there and that was a disadvantage. They could only see me as Floyd and Sally's daughter, they would remember the pranks I pulled in confirmation, I would never be an adult in their eyes, plus I knew too much about them to be objective sometimes.

The same thing is going on here. The people think that they know who Jesus is and how he should be acting. They don't trust him enough to bring many of their sick to him to be healed, so he could do nothing for them. He was blown away by their unbelief—even of his own family. He was totally rejected by those who should have supported him the most.

Now remember that he had the disciples with him the whole time this was going on and they were watching and listening to everything. They saw the town put him down and reject him. Now Jesus says to them, "Ok, now it's your turn. You go out and do what I've been doing. Oh, and don't take anything extra with you. You have to depend on the kindness of others for all of your needs."

If I had been listening to Mark's Gospel up to this point; I may have mentioned to Jesus that the disciples really weren't preaching and healing material—at least not yet. Granted they've been with him from the beginning watching him heal and cast out demons, hearing him preach and teach about the kingdom of God and three of them—Peter, James and John—have seen him raise a girl from the dead. And yet, after seeing all of this they're afraid of him when he stills a storm or can't understand how Jesus can feel the difference between a touch for healing and a bump by the crowd. Jesus himself has called them men of little faith and he wants to send them out to the villages to do what he's been doing.

And if I were one of the disciples I wouldn't be too happy either. Here we've just watched you be humiliated and rejected by your home town; by the people who should be backing you up and supporting you. Now you want us to go out

and do the same thing you've been doing, rely on the hospitality of strangers and face the possibility of rejection. We don't know if we can do it.

But Jesus sends them out in pairs anyway and you know what—they're successful! They come back and tell about casting out demons and healing the sick.

How many times have we missed out on hearing the message of God's grace because the messenger doesn't look like we think they should look or act like we think they should act? Did they have the wrong skin color or were they the wrong sex or maybe they were homeless and at a shelter? When we start to divide people into us and them—we will always find Jesus with those we have named as them.

How many times have we as a congregation missed out on the mighty acts that God wants to do right here because we don't trust that anything is going to happen here? What difference will it make when we believe that Jesus is present in our midst as we worship or as we meet in committees? What would our lives look like if we trusted that Jesus was present? How many times have we missed the opportunity to tell others of God's great love for us because we thought we didn't know enough? We might fail, but according to Paul that is when God is most powerful—in our weakness. As Mother Teresa is reported to have said, "You only know that Jesus is all you need when Jesus is all you have."

I want to close with a prayer. Let us pray, gracious God, your church is composed of people like us, we help make it what it is. It will be friendly, if we're friendly. Its pews will be filled, if we help fill them. It will do great work, if we work.

It will make generous gifts to many causes, if we are generous givers. It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship, if we invite and bring them. It will be a church where people grow in faith and serve you, if we are open to such growth and service. With your help Lord, we shall dedicate ourselves to the task of being all the things you want your church to be.<sup>1</sup> Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor Meredith Musaus from Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Menomonee Falls, WI, 2012