

Sermon for Proper 9B
Sunday, July 8, 2018
“Open to the Kingdom of God”

Text: Mark 6:1-13

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today’s Gospel passage makes me feel a bit unsettled and uncomfortable, because the story on the surface seems to show Jesus as being powerless. Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth, and while there, he began to teach in the synagogue. The scripture tells us that the people were astounded at what Jesus had to say; they were utterly amazed, they were dumbfounded, they were at a loss and left gaping in astonishment. They responded by saying, “Who does this guy think he is? How is he saying all that incredible stuff and claiming to do all those things he says he did? Isn’t he just a carpenter, the son of Mary? Isn’t that James, Joses, Judas, and Simon’s big brother? Who does he think he is?” And here’s where the story gets really disturbing. We learn that Jesus “could do no deed of power there.” Now I’d better put a little context to this story so you see just how incredible this situation is. You see, Jesus found himself back in Nazareth after several important events over the previous few days. Jesus had cured a guy with a withered hand, he had calmed the stormy sea just by saying, “Peace, be still,” he had been to the land of the Geresenes and drove a demon out of a man, he had cured a woman of her twelve-year hemorrhage simply by her touching his garment, AND he had brought the daughter of a synagogue leader back from the dead. But, in Nazareth, he could do no deeds of power. See, with the exception of curing a few sick people, Jesus was unable to do any great deeds of power because the people simply did not believe—they were lacking in faith.

Even though this story seems to show Jesus in a vulnerable and powerless position, I think this story is a lesson in how we as people often respond to change and how the Kingdom of God often challenges us by putting change right in our faces. Our lives are in a state of constant change. We are constantly being moved from one place to another in some way. We move, we change jobs, we get old, we change our minds; and as much as we change, others change around us in the same way and the world around us changes constantly in some way. When things change, when we are confronted with the things we don’t expect, we often become

unsettled. We might even become anxious. We start to act like the unbelieving crowd in Nazareth who expected Jesus to be the cute little boy they remembered. But he wasn't. He grew up and returned to give them a new outlook on life. But they weren't ready; they weren't ready to accept that things were indeed different. They weren't able to envision the incredible power that Jesus had, they weren't able to see how Jesus was lord and master over sickness, disaster, and even death itself. They were unable to see that Jesus was intensively trying to show them the Kingdom of God, but they didn't believe that it could be. They weren't ready to enter the Kingdom of God. For that matter, are we?

One of the reasons that the crowd was so disturbed by Jesus is because he pushed them out of their comfort zone. He disrupted their world and the way it was supposed to work. They couldn't imagine that Jesus was capable of doing the things he and others said he did. They couldn't imagine a Jesus who existed outside the box they made for him. We aren't so different sometimes, are we? Sometimes we can't imagine a world that exists outside the box that we have created for it. Like the crowd who did not have faith in Jesus's miraculous works, the world often fails—or refuses—to see the movement of God when God is trying to move humanity to a new place. God leads us through our comfort zones, so we have a foundation to move on to something greater, but then takes us out of that in order for us to progress to the next step—to grow. Life in God's Kingdom is just that—life. Things that are alive are constantly changing, constantly growing, constantly evolving. That stops when a living organism dies. That evolution applies to our personal lives as well. We aren't meant to be the same person all our lives. As long as we are alive, God expects us to strive to be something better, greater, stronger. We are not supposed to stay in our person comfort zones; we should constantly be growing, pushing the limits, and challenging ourselves to do better and be better. We should always be striving to be our best and do our best in God's Kingdom.

If we allow ourselves to be open to God's power and movement in the world, then we can follow the second half of today's Gospel lesson. That's the part where Jesus tells his disciples to go out and spread the good news, not worrying what others think. Jesus sent out his disciples and gave them the authority to do the things that he did. See, even in the midst of disbelief, God is still in control. Remember, Jesus calmed

the stormy waves of the sea despite the disciples' lack of faith. He could have performed greater miracles in Nazareth, but he probably realized there were greater issues to tend to, like equipping his disciples for ministry. But, he prepared them for rejection as well. The Christian life isn't always popular; the Christian life is often countercultural. Of course, what's "popular" and "cultural" is a matter of human interpretation, and depends on who you ask. But we must have the courage to speak up.

The take-home message for us is to always look for the movement of God in our lives and in the world, as he moves us toward his Kingdom. If we constantly strive for something greater, to be something greater, we can move closer to living in the Kingdom. Amen.

Resources

Feasting on the Word for Proper 9 (Year B, Volume 3).

The Working Preacher, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1324