

July 8, 2018

Pentecost 7/Lectionary 14

GOSPEL

Mark 6:1–13

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

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²On 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! ³Is 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. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If 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." ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

So maybe a little Christmas or Advent in July this morning. Think for a moment about John the Baptist, the one whose voice cries out in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Messiah. Maybe it's easy to think of John the Baptist coming to people in a time in which they were geared up to hear him and say here is a prophet, here is a forerunner to the Son of God. But this was not true, people were busy then, just as people are busy now. They were going about their own lives when this figure of John came confronting them and forcing them to look at life in a different way. They too had to make sense out of things, they too had to ask themselves: Is this the way of God? Is this another crazy fool? Is this the right message at the right time? Is this truth? Is this authentic?

Recognizing that God is in our midst, that God is still speaking and calling us into action in the summer of 2018, amidst of our day to day living, our summer breaks, our vacations, and even when things maybe are not going to best around us, even as things remain ever busy, we ask ourselves how is it that God is among us? How are we listening and acting for God's Kingdom? God calls us from strange places, even like John the Baptist in the wilderness, God calls us from things that are sometimes intimidating. A voice cries out, though it might initially be frightening, it comes seeking to direct us to align ourselves with God's intention for this world, for our lives.

In our Gospel text today, this authentic call and teaching to live in God's way come from none other than Jesus Christ himself, as he teaches in the very synagogue he grew up; we are told people are astounded at his teaching, but soon they begin to question this, soon they begin to find a way to silence it, soon they begin to seek ways to close their ears to what Jesus is teaching, announcing, and embodying, so much so that they take

this astonishment and turn it into offense. Even Jesus himself is amazed at their unbelief, even Jesus himself says: “Prophets are not without honor except in their hometown.”

Today, in the summer of 2018, and every day, I believe there are voices around us that point us to an authentic and deeper relationship with God, to point us to a deeper relationship and service to Christ; a deeper and more authentic way to live out our lives in such a way that it helps, guides, and points the way to the Reign of God that continues, despite headlines, despite amazing unbelief, despite sidestepping the truths that prevail in the ways of the world. Those voices might be in the church, they might come from outside the church, they may come from the most devoted, they may come from the most disenfranchised, they may come from the most spiritually committed, they may come from even disbelievers, and even our enemies. God knows no boundaries to stop God’s constant inbreaking message. This authentic word and direction from God may make us feel more secure, but more often than not, they tend to make us feel more insecure. However, if they point us to the way of relating to others in the name of Christ, perhaps we need to open our ears to listen. Maybe you are a voice for another person’s life; maybe someone who you least expect is crying out to you. But it is amazing the lengths we will go to try to not listen, avoid, take offense like the people in Jesus’ hometown, so that we can gloss over, side step or rationalize away the direction that God is summoning us to. We get creative in our ways of blocking out God’s Word to us.

It’s like the Direct TV commercials, of why people prefer to keep their cable. There is a series of commercials saying that people still like cable, just like people like banging their heads on a low ceiling, like getting your

arm stuck in a vending machine, like camping in poison ivy, like getting a paper cut when licking an envelope, like drinking spoiled milk, like wet grocery bags that break, like getting a bad haircut, like overcrowded trains, like turnstiles that do no turn, like spilling coffee on yourself, like, well we get the idea by now. We will endure a lot to avoid truth, avoid change, and yet avoid God's intent for the world and our lives, God's message for our being, so much so that Jesus is amazed at unbelief. So much so that like even the people of Jesus's day, we can see to run God out of our town.

Last Sunday, we know 19 of our youth were attending the ELCA National Youth Gathering in Houston. Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton addressed the opening mass gathering with the words to the youth: "You are the resistance" to a rousing response. While I wasn't there, what I am guessing she was telling the Christian youth of our church is that you are the resistance to the ways of the world that seeks to crush people, categorized people, that emphasizes division and hate, that these young people are the resistance to all of that and are empowered to stand up for God's presence in this world and God's hope and healing for this planet.

Why is it sometimes so much easier to look past, sidestep or ignore the message and nudging of the Holy Spirit to act in what we believe is authentic to God's purpose for God's creation? I would guess that there are a myriad of reasons. But chief among them, perhaps like those hometown colleagues of Jesus, is the old but all-powerful notion of fear. The fear of the unknown, the fear of resistance, the fear of rejection, fear of failure, the fear of being isolated, the fear of being wrong, the fear of falling flat on our face, the fear of pain, the fear of punishment, the fear of hopelessness, for fear of change that so easily swallows our actions, hopes, dreams, intentions. Sometimes it just seems so much easier to bang my head on

that ceiling, to drink that spoiled milk, to spill my coffee rather than make God encouraged changes for my life and for my community and for those who have been pushed to the margins.

Fear is a great paralyzer. In the gospels what's interesting about Jesus' life is that he almost always scolds fear, but not so much failure or errors or brokenness and even sin. Instead he scolds fear. In the first letter of John, it is written that love cast out fear; that there is no fear in love. You see, we cannot rationalize fear away; even as one lays their head on their pillow at night, and sometimes the fears that begin to seep into our brains, our thoughts, and our mental processing the day, haunt and dominate our thinking and it cannot be quelled often by simple rationalization, otherwise these things would easily subside. Instead it is love, it is belonging, it is trusting in the promises of God, the promises of God's acceptance, the promises of unconditional grace, and promises of unconditional love that transcends the very fear that often we seek to avoid.

Our Gospel text says that Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. "And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them." - which actually in my terms I would still call fairly successful, but instead Jesus moves on, keeps on acting and begins teaching in other villages. He does not stop his mission, he does not succumb to his amazement, instead he resists, he perseveres, he triumphs. Of course, we are not Jesus, but yet we know the resurrection promise, we know God's final word. May we seek to trust enough, be fearless enough, be bold enough in trusting God's Holy Spirit that nudges us to act in sharing God's in breaking reign and hope for this world. Amen.