

"Home Preaching"

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

July 8, 2018 -- 14th Ord

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. {2} For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." {3} So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. {4} David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. {5} At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. {10} And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. {3} And I know that such a person--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows-- {4} was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. {5} On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. {6} But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, {7} even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. {8} Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, {9} but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So , I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. {10} Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. {2} On 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! {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} Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." {5} And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. {6} And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. {7} He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. {8} He ordered 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 to put on two tunics. {10} He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. {11} If 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." {12} So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. {13} They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

In a couple of weeks Susan and I are going to make a trip up to NC to my hometown to see and celebrate by Dad's 95th birthday and to meet the newest member of the Lee family – Nola Grace – who is my oldest brother, John's grandchild and first child of my nephew Mark and his wife Courtney. I've also been asked, being the token member of the clergy in the clan, to participate in her baptism. A true honor.

Now most of you know me pretty well. You know that in the 37 years I've been ordained I've done dozens and dozens of baptisms. I've preached and led worship hundreds of times. But I can still remember the very first time I preached, or at least talked from the front of the room from the pulpit in my home church. I can remember how nervous I was and I can remember the feeling in me concerning the scrutiny that would accompany anything I had to say. While preparing what I would hesitate to call a sermon on the story of Zaccaeus, I consulted with my pastor who assured me that as long as I didn't say Zacheus had horns and served Jesus wings and beer I'd be o.k. But I wasn't all that sure. To this day, whenever I have the chance to go home and preach in the church that became my Mom and Dad's place of worship, I feel like an awkward and unsure 17 year old. I can almost hear them saying, "isn't that Lenwood and Ernestines boy? Isn't he John and Steve and Kate and Tim's brother? And I worry about them, for some reason taking offense to what and how I say things.

Hometown's are hometowns and where we're from is important. But hometowns may be tough on their children. Even if they are proud of them, there's going to be scrutiny. Especially if they live in a manner that doesn't sit well with the locals.

It's hard to say why, but it seems like the story in Mark today must have taken place in the summer. It's reasonable to think that when Jesus goes back home to Nazareth, that maybe he's there to get some rest, maybe to see the family, maybe because it's on the way he happens to be traveling. We don't know. We do know he's back there because he has a plan in mind. Because this place, Nazareth, where this ministry started, is where the push to the end begins. It's almost like a politician announcing the plan to run for office back in the friendly environs of the home town. And they hope people remember them fondly.

The truth is, back home isn't always a welcoming place. There are too many reminders around about what used to be. Too many stories to be told by the family and friends that take all you have accomplished and put it in a totally different perspective. As Jesus speaks, some are kind of impressed at what he's saying, but for the most part they are thinking, "Hmmm, isn't this Joseph's son? What's he doing back here in Nazareth? He looks the same. But he acts different. Who does he think he is saying these things?"

This is where people remember what he looked like as a baby. They were there when he ran through the dusty streets at 8 looking, like all his friends, like a dust magnet. They remember the gangly teenager who was really kind of shy and mainly hung around the carpenter shop until, well until a few months ago when the rumor went around that he had left to become a preacher of all things. They knew he was religious....there was that thing in the temple when he was 12....just not that much. They knew he made a nice table and chair set, but a preacher, a rabbi, a healer?

It must have felt strange for Jesus. His mom's old best friend Miriam giggling as he walked in the synagogue. His dad's lodge buddies snickering. In fact on this rare occasion, Mark tells us that Jesus, was kind of at a loss. Unable to do what he always did. Well almost. It led him to say, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house, " which pretty much means, 'you aren't likely to get much respect at home where far too many people know you.' Especially when you don't do things the way people think you should do things. There's a great line that follows that sometimes gets left out, " And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them." Which I guess for Jesus means even on a bad day, he is still Jesus.

Of course as it turns out, how Jesus was viewed there in Nazareth had little to do with what he accomplished. But remember, Jesus has a plan. It is

Jesus experience that inspires what comes next. Jesus uses the occasion as a kind of training ground for his disciples and hence, of course for us. He wants them to know that representing God, bearing the faith, being a disciple, means not always being accepted.....even where acceptance should be a given.

Jesus, sends out the disciples by twos to do what he has been doing. To preach, to teach, to heal, to tell people God's kingdom is at hand. He tells them not to take anything with them except what they are wearing, implying of course that they will have to rely on the kindness of strangers but mostly upon God to take care of them when they are doing what they are called to do. They go fully aware that even what they have to say and what they have to give will not always be received or wanted. And they must move on. Shake the dust from their feet and move on. He wants to instill in them the desire to share this good news, no matter what the opposition. In Jesus name, they were able to accomplish many things, but things don't always work so well. Mark says, “ So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. {13} They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.”

What Jesus has always desired and what disciples, then and now, have always been called on to do is offer that which only Jesus can offer. Freedom from the restraints our sin places upon us and freedom from that which would oppress us spiritually, emotionally and physically. Jesus calls upon us to be the very ones who communicate what he has to offer, not to constrain, not to

impose bounds, but to illuminate, and to liberate us to live, freely, as his servants in the world.

A couple of weeks ago the General Assembly of our church met in St. Louis. Most of what took place there will pass unnoticed as benign church business. The world doesn't really care about what we call our clergy or what our Book of Order looks like or whether or not we have a new book of common worship. In the scope of things we're a pretty small denomination of only about million and a half. Which may mean our voice isn't very loud anyway. But Jesus would tell us that whether we're two or three or a million and a half that we are still the church. His church. And that like the disciples of Jesus we are called to go into the world and represent Jesus Christ, even when what we say or do may not be popular. The task of the church is now, just as it was with the disciples, to watch Jesus. To learn from Jesus. To see what he does, to note that what he said and did wasn't always understood or popular and it certainly doesn't always sit well with the folks back home...the folks in the pews.... but if it is what we see Jesus do. If it is what we come to understand that Jesus wants us to be and do it is our calling.

Then he asks us to make ourselves vulnerable to his call. He asks us to be willing to take stands that may be unpopular but which are right. Sometimes that means saying we're just not sure and we have to think and pray and watch

Jesus even more closely for a little while longer. Sometimes it means we make a stand that will be unpopular.

As much as we'd like it to be different, following Jesus calls us to change. Jesus was not the same Jesus that grew up in Nazareth, or at least the Jesus they thought they knew. Sometimes Jesus comes to us and what he says sounds pretty good to us. Love God, love your neighbor as you love yourself. Then he says love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Then he's seen down the street talking to a prostitute. Then he's healing somebody on the Sabbath. Then he's telling the rich young ruler to sell everything and follow him. Then he's speaking to the foreigner, or preaching about welcoming the stranger, or saying that forgiveness isn't something you can limit but is an infinite commodity, then he tells us to let the children come to him, then he says he has come to release the captives, and clothe the naked, and proclaim God's kingdom. And he looks at us and says to us ---- now you go and do the same thing. And maybe, like the hometown folks, we say, 'who does he think he is?'

Following Jesus calls for vulnerability. Following Jesus calls on us to be and do what is right over against what is popular and accepted and status quo. And sometimes that means staying the course. Sometimes it means charting a new course entirely.

Jesus and a pudgy 17 year first time preacher ultimately had the same goal, although Jesus' has a far more vast domain. What it is, is to create an environment in which people can live to be who they are supposed to be. To be free to make choices based on broader ways of looking at things, not the narrow minded safety of the accepted norm. It means that not all the things you do are going to be popular with everybody, even sometimes people in authority, but the courage in God to do them anyway. Jesus sends us out, he tells us, strip yourselves of all the things you cling to for support. Trust in God and go, take the good news to the most vulnerable among us, take the news that God cares for and loves all people. Go and proclaim release the captive when it's the right thing to do. Go with only the love of Christ as a guide. It means, that if our children are going to have a church that lasts long enough to have their children and his grandchildren be baptized, we have got to get busy with the task of going from the safety and security of this place out into the world, two by two by two, to share the good news. It's news that some will welcome....and some will not.... we share the news, shake the dust from our feet and move on.... God does the rest.