

July 4th, 2021

Year B; 6th Pentecost

Ezekiel 2: 1-5

Psalm 123

Mark 6:1-13

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Jesus came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 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! 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. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 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." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Today we again have a 2-part story from the gospel of Mark. The past few weeks we have heard of Jesus calming storms, and of healing the woman who had been hemorrhaging 12 years and the young daughter of Jairus. And folks are pushing to see Jesus and the crowds growing of folks eager to hear him preach and desperate for his healing.

And then he goes home. And we might expect home to contain just Mary and Joseph, eagerly awaiting his visit.

Yes, we tend to think of Jesus, with Mary and Joseph, frozen in place at the manger, the 3 of them, in a Christmas card in our minds. Or perhaps, if we stretch a bit, we remember the story in Luke, when Jesus is 12 years old, and he and Mary and Joseph travel to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, and Jesus secretly stays behind, when their group of unspecified family and friends leave to return home.

Luke tells us of Mary and Joseph looking for Jesus and finally, after 3 frantic days, finding him teaching in the Temple. And we picture the family from the manger heading home, as his mom “....treasured all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:51b)

But today we hear that Jesus had brothers, 4 of them named here, and sisters too!

But besides that story in Luke of Jesus at 12 years old, the Bible is silent on Jesus’s life from birth to when he emerges at 30 years old, going to his cousin John at the Jordan River to be baptized and to begin his public life and ministry. But it is glimpses like today’s reading that remind us that Jesus was both completely holy, of God, AND completely human, like us, sharing our humanity, including being a brother, being a son.

We hear today of Jesus’s humanity too in the reactions of people in his hometown, in Nazareth, when he visits and begins to teach in the synagogue. The townsfolk, his neighbors, people who have known him all of his life, all through those years that the Gospels are silent about....childhood, teenager, young adult....the neighbors say, when Jesus preaches.....”Are you kidding me??” “Jesus, we know him, Joseph and Mary’s boy, our town carpenter? We know his sisters, his brothers....and he is trying to preach to us? Well, la de da!”

The text tells us the neighbors are first “astounded”, then “take offense”

and then are filled with “unbelief”.

All of this prompting Jesus, at least with a weary tone, and perhaps with a grumpy, human tone, to quote Proverbs: “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”

This still familiar quote has often been quoted at family reunions, down through the ages!

And in fact, Jesus cannot accomplish much in his hometown, and he has to move on to other villages, and teach and preach and send out his disciples from places away from his hometown, a place he was still known as, just that kid Jesus.

This story, and others like it, serve a crucial purpose in our understanding of and connection with Jesus. As Christians we are prone to focusing, even over focusing, on the godliness of Jesus, speaking of the miracles he performed and putting him high on a godly pedestal, resplendent in white robes with a golden halo.

These stories remind us that, while Jesus was that godly vision, he was also completely human; God sent God’s Son in order to be closer to God’s creation, to us, to know what it is to be human. Jesus as Emmanuel, meaning, God with us.

And thus Jesus was human like us, a little toddler learning to walk, a teenager growing up, a young adult who hears: “We are supposed to listen to HIM? Are you kidding me?”

Jesus knew what it was to be us.....to be tired, to be discouraged, to be overwhelmed...and to be joyous, to be hopeful, to be filled with the glory of being fully, humanly alive.

Which brings us back to the second part of today’s gospel, when Jesus, away from his hometown, calls his disciples and sends them out to preach

and heal. Jesus sends them out “two by two”, not alone.

Jesus in his humanity knew that his disciples, his friends, would not do well if sent out alone. Jesus in his humanity, connected to us humans, God with us, knows that we do better when we are together.

I know that when I ponder a problem alone it gets bigger and bigger and my mood gets darker. When I allow others in, the burden lightens and hope is more possible.

As Jesus sends his friends out, as Jesus still sends us out into the world beyond the doors of our church, Jesus does not say:

“I want to see a full calendar of activities and increasing numbers in the pews each week!”

No, Jesus sent out the disciples and still sends us, to offer healing to the ailing in body mind and spirit, and repentance, new life to those in sorrow and regret and pain.....

In other words, church is not the calendar, the church is not numbers, the church is being a vessel of God’s love, the church is inviting folks to know the human Jesus, who knows us each so well, and who walks with us.

And the church too is listening together, being quiet enough to glimpse the mystery, the holiness of our Savior, to glimpse beyond this bend in the river, to know deep in our souls the love and forgiveness of our God, and then to go out, together, and share that life-changing love with our cruel and broken world.

Amen.

