

Sermon for Fifth Sunday of Pentecost, July 5, 2009

2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10, Psalm 48, 2 Corinthians 12:2-10, Mark 6:1-13

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Mark's gospel begins with the announcement of the *Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ*. He goes on to write about the message of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, the temptation of Jesus. This is followed by what is referred to as "the Galilean ministry," then the call of the disciples, the curing of a demoniac; of Simon Peter's mother-in-law and other healings and, after this, Jesus leaves the area to continue to preach the Good News in other towns and villages. Mark then records that Jesus cures a leper, a paralytic, a man with a withered hand. In chapter four we read about Jesus preaching parables and calming the storm at sea. In chapter five Jesus heals another Demoniac but this time it was in the Decapolis and following that he raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead and cured a woman who suffered with hemorrhages for twelve years

All this is to give a background to Jesus' ministry as recorded by Mark and it points to a ministry in every place but his hometown. By the time Jesus returns to his native land, the villagers would have heard of their famous wandering rabbi who was stirring up the people in other places with his wisdom and his healing powers.

Jesus may have been looking forward to returning to his village, visiting family and neighbors, a time to relax. As we know from the story of Jairus, the person in charge of the synagogue would be the one who determined who read and taught in the synagogue and we can only presume that this person offered Jesus an opportunity to do so. What is of interest here is that, while Mark records Jesus preaching in a synagogue in Nazareth, to date there has been no archeological find of a synagogue in the village and many Biblical scholars believe the village was too small to have had one.

Jesus began to teach and, it is reasonable to believe, he said some things that upset a few people. There were those who were fascinated at his teaching ability and genuinely wondered where he got such wisdom. After all, their only memory and experience of him was as a carpenter growing up in the village. They knew he did not go to a rabbinical school. But as we all know, familiarity can breed contempt.

The conversation turned from fascination to anger. Behind the statement “*Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses, and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us*” is the question, “Who does he think he is?”

Notice that Joseph is not mentioned in this. Some biblical scholars believe that Joseph is not mentioned because Mark believed that God was the father of Jesus. In the early church, this was understood to be a reference to the belief that Jesus was an illegitimate child. It could be said that the jealousy of the neighbors, not being able to find fault with his preaching or his powers to heal, did what humans continue to do when they can't find fault with someone they know, they began a character assassination of Jesus.

Mark put it simply, *They took offense at him*. If we stop and think about this simple statement we can hear statements like, “What does he know about the kingdom of God?” “Where did he learn to tell parables like that?” “Doesn't he know he's offending the leaders?”

When we choose not to listen to someone, especially someone we know, we begin to question their education. The easiest manner of denial or dismissal is to begin to question the person's certification or their abilities. If this doesn't work we then question their family background with statements like “I knew his mother and I just can't imagine him turning out like this?” or “Well, you know his dad, you can't expect much better!” or “Well, you know where he went to school, this is the kind of thing they teach there these days.” Behind these statements is an attitude designed to put up walls that prevents us from hearing a message that we may need to hear. These statements make us feel superior to the person and justify our not having to listen to him or her.

While most of us would be upset or discouraged by these remarks, Jesus simply called it as he saw it. He pointed out that there was little he could do for them because of their negativity. He did not make it personal. He was clear the problem was not his but theirs and they, not him, needed to change. He did not buy into the blaming game. He simply acknowledged the problem was not his and only those who chose to, listened to

Some of them were the ones he was able to cure. He left and continued on with his mission to preach the good news to other towns and villages.

As he moved on he send his apostles into the countryside two by two and gave them authority. From one point of view it could be understood that Jesus was giving his apostles a framework in which to carry out their mission; Avoid unnecessary baggage, use your time well; and be compassionate.

Not infrequently when a church or business begins to formulate their mission statement they become wordy. They want to cover every option, to make sure they are politically correct, have covered all the basis, make sure than potential customers know everything about them in a few sentences. Such is the unnecessary baggage. The simple message is, *The kingdom of God is within you*. Once this is consciously accepted then the rest will become clear as we ask “how do I praise God? How do I worship God, What is my role in the kingdom of God? How do I treat my neighbor?” The point is to keep it simple.

Jesus advised them to use their time well. There is a tendency to think we have to do everything, to be everywhere. Jesus told his apostles to stay where they were accepted. Later on St. Benedict would create for his community a vow of stability. This did not mean stagnation. Rather it prevented one from getting into the mindset of “If only I was over there I could...” Or, “If I were in the city I could...” Jesus was also very clear about not wasting time. “If they do not listen to you, leave.” The message of God, the message of peace, forgiveness, compassion etc., is a simple message but difficult for people who like to harbor grudges and resentments to hear. Jesus tells his disciples to preach them message but don’t waste your time if people don’t wish to listen to you.

Jesus went on to tell them not only to leave but to *shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them*. This is not a message of saying “I don’t like you for not listening to me. Rather, Jesus is making it clear that the disciples, when they leave, leave the negativity behind them and not bring it with them to the next community.

All too often when we have disagreements we carry anger from one situation to

another. There are those who become “angry people” or are described as having “a chip on their shoulder.” This is the result of carrying around from one place to another all the accumulated anger that is unresolved. All too often a person doesn’t recognize just how angry they are and eventually it becomes a physical problem.

The disciples not only not to be burdened by emotional or other baggage and to use their time well, they were also to be compassionate. In order to be compassionate we have to let go of our emotional baggage. It is difficult to care for, to feel with, another person while we are in emotional turmoil ourselves. Sooner or later our turmoil will spill over into our ministry, into our work and will interfere even with the good work we may be doing. In order to be compassionate we have to focus, to use our time well. All too often there are those who think that the world will not function without them. These individuals are overworked, over volunteer, over extended. They do not have time for themselves and if they do not have time for themselves they cannot have time for others. While being physically present to another they are emotionally and mentally elsewhere. To be compassionate is to be present to, to be present with, the person who is hurting, who needs our prayers, our help.

The disciples did what Jesus directed them to do and discovered they had new abilities, new powers; *they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

Listening to this gospel story this morning we have to ask ourselves if our familiarity with the Gospels has led to contempt or dislike for the Gospel stories? It is possible that, because we have heard them so often we think we know them and so we don’t really listen to them any longer. The stories have become so familiar that we have become numb to them. Often we think we know what the gospel story is saying and we do not wish to hear a different presentation on it.

Listening to the gospel story this morning we have to ask ourselves just how really busy we are. Are we so busy we do not have time for ourselves? Are we so busy that we are giving the message we don’t trust others to do anything but ourselves? Are we saying that we don’t trust God?

Listening to this morning's gospel we have to ask ourselves just how compassionate are we. If we are not taking care of ourselves, then how can we have time to be compassionate? If we are not listening to our own body, to our own emotions, then we are not really listening to the body language or the emotions of those who are seeking our help.

O God, grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.