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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9B)

July 5, 2015

Text: Mark 6:1–13

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today's gospel reading from Mark 6:1–13 begins with all the promise of a hometown celebrity returning home with much promise and fanfare. Jesus has quickly developed the reputation of being a great teacher, miracle worker, and powerful man of faith. And He's returning home to Nazareth and He'll be preaching this coming Sabbath! You can just imagine the potluck lunch being organized after church.

Well, this was pretty customary. It would be something similar to having a son of a congregation, who is now a pastor somewhere else, return to preach to the homefolks. Vs. 2–3 says the hometown folks are “astonished” at Jesus teaching saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works 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?”

Do you hear the tone of their questions? How can He do and say these things? Who does He think He is? He seems to be getting a little big for Himself! In short, they are scandalized by Jesus. The rest of vs. 3 says, “And they took offense at him.” Literally, they keep on being scandalized by Him.

The cause of their offense is Jesus' ordinariness and their familiarity with Him. He's one of the hometown folks, one of them. We know His family. We saw Him grow up with our kids and grandkids. And He thinks He's a miracle worker, a wise man, the Son of God! Really, Jesus, this is too much! We played ball down the road when we were kids and now you think you're God's Son!! Come on!

It's Jesus' humanity that causes so much offense to so many people. Our Lord's humanity isn't celebrated very much. Christmas is about the only time it receives much attention. But then, who can take offense at a newborn baby? They're too cute, too adorable to be troublesome. By and large, Jesus' humanity is acknowledged but practically ignored. The humility and poverty of the manger are just part of the trappings of Christmas.

But that humility of ordinary human flesh and blood can't be ignored forever. The good folks of Nazareth couldn't get past what they thought they knew about Jesus; His history, His family, their familiarity with the man Jesus. When the humanity of Jesus demonstrated His divine nature in authoritative preaching and teaching, eye brows began to rise, doubts increased, rebellion and rejection set in.

Jesus Himself says, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household" (vs. 4). Or to use a modern saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." It's the things we know the most, the things we are most accustomed to that we treat with the greatest contempt. Have you ever noticed how you treat your spouse or kids at times? Words are said and things are done in such a way and with such a tone that strangers and friends would never experience.

Luther identifies this sinful tendency in his explanation to the 4th Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." His explanation is "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them." It's so easy to despise – to detest or treat spitefully – those whom we are the closest to; those who are the most ordinary and common to us. These things ought not to be, dear saints of God. Despising ordinary and familiar persons and things is the fruit of our sinful nature.

Despising God's good gifts is a dreadful sin with deadly consequences. Look at vs. 5–6, "And he (that is Jesus) could do no mighty works there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief." Their contempt for Jesus was so powerful that Jesus, the Lord of glory, could not do any mighty works there. Notice that Mark says that Jesus "could not" do them. It isn't that Jesus wasn't willing but that He couldn't.

There's something we need to always keep in mind about the place and purpose of miracles. Jesus never performed miracles to create faith or to make people believe. The mighty wonders Jesus did supported those who believed His word about God's kingdom; it brought deliverance to those who believed Jesus could help them. Christ's Word of the Gospel is what creates faith, not miracles.

God's Gospel power was there for the good folks of Nazareth. The kingdom of God stood among them in the most familiar of persons, Jesus brother to James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, Jesus the carpenter and Son of Mary. Sin and unbelief fixed hold of

that common, ordinary looking Jesus of Nazareth and said it's all preposterous. And Jesus, in turn, marveled at their unbelief.

Dear saints of God, I begin to bring today's sermon to a conclusion with a caution and a promise. The caution is that you and I can easily fall into the same sin of despising the common ways through which Jesus chooses to come among us. The promise is that our Lord has chosen to come among us through the reading and preaching of His Word and through the faithful administration of baptism, holy absolution, and Lord's Supper.

It's easy to despise the reading and preaching of God's Word. The Small Catechism cautions us here too with the explanation to the 3rd Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." Luther's says, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." How many years have you read God's Word (since Sunday School) and listened to sermon after sermon (since your baptism as an infant)? Same o' same o'.

We follow the 3-year lectionary, that cycle of readings from Matthew, Mark, and Luke (with John thrown in from time to time) which takes us through the main events and primary teachings of the Lord Jesus. In many cases, I have now preached on those texts three times, I'm now entering upon the 4th time. And this doesn't take into account the parallel readings that show up in the other years. This means that it's quite possible that I have preached on a particular event in the Lord's life some 7–9 times! Ever had that feeling...haven't we heard this before? Chances are, yes, is one way or another.

And then there's your familiarity with me. The same cadence, the same pattern of articulation, the same or similar trains of thought are manifested in every sermon. I can assure you, my sermons are my own (for better or for worse). I don't pull them off the internet or from a book of collected sermons.

And yet, the Bible declares that saving, justifying faith comes by hearing God's Word preached and proclaimed through an ordinary, sinful man called into a holy office (Romans 10). This faith, focused upon Jesus and created by God's holy Word, brings to you Christ's gifts of forgiveness, life, salvation, the promise of the resurrection unto eternal life, the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, victory in Christ now and forever, and so much more. Let it not be said about us that Christ could not do many mighty works here because of unbelief growing out of contemptuous familiarity!

It's easy to despise our baptism. Water is so common. And yet God's Word says that baptismal waters combined with God's Word works the forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe. Those are mightier works than healing the blind! Let it not be said about us that Christ could not do His baptismal wonders here because of unbelief.

It's easy to ignore the opportunity for private confession and absolution. It's scary to confess sins to another person. And my pastor is a sinner too! Can God really use such a weak vessel to bestow His grace and forgiveness? And yet the resurrected Jesus invests the apostolic ministry with these powerful words, "If you forgive any his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (John 20:22–23). As far as the east is from the west, sins are cast away when they are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Let it not be said about us that Christ could not relieve and heal burdened consciences here because of unbelief.

It's easy to consider the Lord's Supper an add-on during the Sunday worship service and not very important for daily life. Jesus says He gives us His body and His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Through the most common kind of ordinary bread and wine, we united together with the Lord Jesus Christ and with each other in holy bonds that transcend any natural connections of this earthly life. Let it not be said about us that Christ could not come among us here with His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The warning for you saints of Immanuel/St. John's Lutheran Church is that the exalted Jesus comes among us through easily despised gifts; gifts that are here day after day, week after week, year after year. Let us repent of any hint of disdain for Christ's gifts.

The promise for you saints of Immanuel/St. John's Lutheran Church is that the exalted Jesus comes among us through these offered gifts. Everything that Jesus wants to give to you is offered in total abundance. The Lord Jesus Christ gives us all the power and grace of His kingdom for your eternal joy and fulfillment. May Jesus, our dear Lord, always come among us into the ages of ages.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.