

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 7-8, 2018
Mark 6:1-13

“Rejection and Repentance”

Scripture Verse: “And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief” (Mark 6:4-6a).

As we travel along life’s journey we come to find out that rejection is part of that journey, and it follows us throughout life. Some rejections are small and some are not so small. Such things as not getting invited to the birthday party that the other kids have been invited to; not getting into the university that you had your heart set on; realizing that the person whom you’re really interested in isn’t so interested in you; coming to grips with the reality that you did not get that promotion that you had hoped for. These, along with a host of other rejections in life, can leave us feeling disappointed and discouraged. Is this how Jesus felt when he returned to his hometown of Nazareth and preached a sermon there? There is rejection before us in today’s Gospel lesson as the hometown folks take offense at Jesus. But there is something else as Jesus sends forth his twelve disciples into a world filled with rejection, calling people to repent and receive the good news of the kingdom of God. That becomes the theme for preaching this day: “Rejection and Repentance.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

We are in Year B of the 3-year series of Scripture readings for worship. Year A follows Matthew’s Gospel, Year B follows Mark’s Gospel, and Year C follows Luke’s Gospel. John’s Gospel is sprinkled throughout each of these three years. So, we are about half-way through Mark’s account of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God. As we make our way through Mark, there is rising opposition to Jesus, especially from the religious authorities centered in Jerusalem. But it’s not limited to them, as we hear today. The folks at home in Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, think that he’s become too big for his britches; too full of himself. After hearing Jesus preach, they say: **“Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works 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?”** (Mark 6:2b-3a). It was not customary in first-century Judaism to describe a man as the son of his mother, even when she was a widow, except in an insulting and derogatory way (see *The Gospel According to Mark*, by William Lane. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974; p. 203). So, the hometown crowd turned ugly and were talking smack about Jesus. They knew that there were only two sources of the wisdom that enabled Jesus to speak with such authority and do such mighty works: either it was God or it was demonic. Their responses here indicate they believed it was the latter. And the net result? **“And they took offense at him”** (Mark 6:3b). The original word here is *σκανδαλίζω*, where we get our word “scandal.” Originally, it meant something that would trip you up and cause you to stumble. Later, it came to mean what it means here: to be offended, or scandalized, by someone or something. That’s what the folks at home thought about Jesus. Sad; very sad. Jesus’ response to all of this is our Scripture verse for this week: **“And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief”** (Mark 6:4-6a). What a terrible and stinging indictment of the people’s hard heartedness: Jesus marveled because of their unbelief! And what about us? We may not be from Jesus’ hometown, but for many of us, we grew up knowing Jesus. Has this familiarity bred contempt for him in our lives? Do we also take offense at Jesus? And does Jesus marvel at our unbelief, unable to do any mighty work in our lives because of our hardness of heart?

The kingdom of God, which is all about the good news of Jesus, moves on! That is important to remember. Rejection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation which he came to bring doesn't mean that everything comes to a screeching halt. The message moves on to other places and other people: **“And he [Jesus] went about among the villages teaching”** (Mark 6:6b). And then comes the sending of the twelve disciples who are empowered by Jesus to carry the message of the kingdom forward. They were given authority over unclean spirits and instructed to take nothing for the journey ahead: no extra food, no luggage, no money, no extra clothes (Mark 6:8-9). They were to trust fully that the Lord would provide for their needs through persons of peace in whatever town they went to. As Pastor Greg Finke has taught us in *Joining Jesus on His Mission*, Jesus truly is out ahead of us in the mission field. After all, it's *his* mission, not ours. He invites us to come alongside him and join him on the mission field in daily life. Because Jesus is already out there ahead of us, there are always persons of peace in the places where Jesus, as Lord of the Church, sends his disciples, then and now. These persons of peace are individuals who, without our saying or doing much at all, are already open and receptive to the kingdom of God. It is through them that Jesus' disciples find a welcome place to stay and whose needs are met while serving in the mission field. We have to trust that the Lord really does work like this.

Our congregation is privileged to support mission efforts in a number of ways, both state-side and overseas. Next Sunday (July 15), we'll hear about Lutheran World Relief (<https://www.lwr.org>) and the amazing work they do around the world to alleviate human suffering. A kit-making event will follow the worship service next Sunday. In two weeks' time (July 22), we will be blessed to have Matt and Dee Dee Wasmund, and daughters Lily and Olivia, serving on the mission field in Seoul, Korea, with us and share their story of what the Lord is doing through them (<https://www.lcms.org/wasmund>). And the week that follows (July 23-27) is Vacation Bible School where God literally brings the mission to us! And so we will commission Vacation Bible School staff members in worship services on July 22. Right here at home, the mission field is all around us: our homes and neighborhoods, our places of work and leisure.

The whole purpose of going out into the mission field is to lead people to Jesus, and this means leading people to repentance. This is more than just feeling sorry for our sins. The thrust and meaning of the word “repent” (Mark 6:12, μετανοέω) is a change of heart and mind. I heard it best explained by a military chaplain once who said, “To repent means an about-face. It means to walk in a new direction.” Amen! We live in our individualistic society where there are no longer objective standards of what is right or wrong, but everything depends on individual subjectivity. We may not like this or agree with this, but that is where many people are at today. Now, how will we bring the good news of Jesus to them? How will we lead them to a change of heart and mind, to walk in a new direction? “We” won't do any of this. It's not our job to do this; that is the work of the Holy Spirit who transforms hearts and minds, who enables people to walk in a new direction. But the Spirit does indeed work through the baptized people of God to point people to Jesus. It is our great privilege and eternal joy to point people to Jesus because only in Jesus is there forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Only in Jesus and his cleansing blood has the debt of our sins been marked “Paid in Full.” Only in Jesus is there the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead and eternal life.

As Jesus' disciples today, we run the risk of rejection, as have disciples in every generation. Not everyone will welcome the Gospel message. With this in mind, it is important for us to hold onto what Paul the apostle tells us in today's Epistle lesson (2 Corinthians 12:2-10): **“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong’**” (2 Corinthian 12:9-12). From rejection to repentance, and from repentance to saving faith. The Lord send us forth into the world he dearly loves and for which he shed his blood. Amen.