

Mark 6: 1-13

STAY IN YOUR LANE. HAS ANYONE EVER SAID THIS TO YOU? HAVE YOU EVER SAID IT TO ANYONE? IT'S AN ADMONISHMENT. THE PHRASE BECAME PROMINENT IN 2018, WHEN THE NRA CRITICIZED EMERGENCY ROOM DOCTORS FOR COMMENTING ON AMERICA'S GUN CRISIS. DOCTORS SHOULD "STAY IN THEIR LANE," THE N.R.A TWEETED. THAT IS, THEY SHOULD PRACTICE MEDICINE AND STICK TO THEIR AREAS OF EXPERTISE, INSTEAD OF EXPRESSING OPINIONS ON SUBJECTS THEY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT. THE DOCTORS RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY BY SHARING STORIES OF PATIENTS WHO HAD ARRIVED IN THEIR EMERGENCY ROOMS FOLLOWING TRAUMATIC GUN-RELATED INJURIES OR DEATHS. "THISISOURLANE," THEY TWEETED.

STAY IN YOUR LANE. IN OUR GOSPEL READING TODAY, JESUS ARRIVES BACK IN HIS HOMETOWN OF NAZARETH AFTER A LONG STRETCH OF MINISTRY. IN THE WEEKS PRECEDING HIS RETURN, HE HAS CHOSEN TWELVE DISCIPLES, EXORCISED DEMONS, HEALED THE SICK, CALMED A STORM, AND RAISED A LITTLE GIRL FROM THE DEAD. HE HAS BECOME, IN OTHER WORDS, A LOCAL HERO.

OR SO WE WOULD THINK. JESUS ENTERS THE SYNAGOGUE OF HIS BOYHOOD, AND BEGINS TO TEACH IN THE TRADITION OF THE RABBIS. AT FIRST, THINGS GO REALLY WELL AS THE TOWNSPEOPLE RECEIVE HIS WORDS WITH ASTONISHMENT. "WHERE DID HE GET ALL THIS?" THEY ASK EACH OTHER. "WHAT IS THIS WISDOM THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO HIM? WHAT DEEDS OF POWER ARE BEING DONE BY HIS HANDS!"

BUT THEN, WITHOUT WARNING, THE MOOD SHIFTS. SOMEONE IN THE CROWD---PERHAPS A JEALOUS OLD NEIGHBOR OF MARY'S OR A CHILDHOOD RIVAL OF JESUS'S, OR THE FAMOUS VILLAGE GOSSIP WHO LOVES STIRRING UP CONFLICT—STARTS ASKING UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS. "IS NOT THIS THE CARPENTER, THE SON OF MARY AND BROTHER OF JAMES AND JOSES AND JUDAS AND SIMON? ARE NOT HIS SISTERS HERE AMONG US?"

YES, THE MOOD IN THE SYNAGOGUE SHIFTS. THE QUESTIONS LEAD TO ACCUSATIONS, CURIOSITY BECOMES CONTEMPT AND THE PEOPLE TAKE OFFENSE. THE PEOPLE DECIDE JESUS IS NOT STAYING IN HIS LANE.

SCHOLARS NOTE THAT THE ONLY REASON TO IDENTIFY SOMEONE BY HIS MOTHER IN JESUS'S DAY WAS TO QUESTION HIS LEGITMACY. TO HIGHLIGHT THE FACT THAT NO ONE KNEW FOR SURE WHO JESUS'S FATHER IS. IN OTHER WORDS, TO REFER TO JESUS AS "THE SON OF MARY" IS A CALUCULATED ACT ON THE PART OF HIS FELLOW VILLAGERS; USE JESUS'S BIRTH STORY AS A WAY TO HUMILATE HIM INTO SILENCE. IN A SOCIAL SYSTEM WHERE ONE'S STATUS IS FIXED AT BIRTH, IT'S NOT POSSIBLE FOR SOMEONE LIKE JESUS—A MERE CARPENTER OF QUESTIONABLE PARENTAGE—TO AMOUNT TO ANYTHING. HE HAS NO BUSINESS SPEAKING WITH AUTHORITY, NO BUSINESS BECOMING A LEADER, MUCH LESS THE MESSIAH. CAN'T YOU HEAR THEM: "DON'T GET TOO BIG FOR YOUR BRITCHES! REMEMBER YOU PLACE."

THE SAD AND ASTONISHING THING ABOUT THIS STORY IS THAT THE VILLAGER'S SUSPICION AND RESENTMENT DIMINISH JESUS'S ABILITY TO WORK GOOD ON THEIR BEHALF. "HE

COULD DO NO DEED OF POWER THERE,” MARK WRITES. THEIR SMALL-MINDEDNESS AND LACK OF TRUST, KEEP THEM IN SPIRITUAL POVERTY. THEIR LACK OF FAITH HAS REAL CONSEQUENCES. IT CONSTRAINS JESUS. IT BLOCKS THE HEALING WORK HE LONGS TO DO FOR THE PEOPLE HE LOVES. PAUSE AND THINK ABOUT THIS FOR A MINUTE. DO WE KNOW THAT OUR UNBELIEF HAS REAL WORLD CONSEQUENCES? THAT IN THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF GOD, WE ARE CALLED TO PARTICIPATE WITH GOD’S SPIRIT IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD? THAT OUR REFUSAL TO BELIEVE MATTERS. JESUS’ POWERLESSNESS IS NOT PRIMARILY ABOUT JESUS BUT ABOUT *US*: ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE UNWILLING TO BELIEVE THE GREAT THINGS GOD CAN DO.

IT’S STAGGERING REALLY TO THINK ABOUT ALL THE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND LOST BLESSINGS BECAUSE OF OUR LIMITED FAITH.

“SOMETHING PRECIOUS IS LOST WHEN WE FAIL TO RECOGNIZE THE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE FAMILIAR. WHEN WE TURN AWAY FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY WITHIN THE ORDINARY. WE MISS THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN OUR MIDST. WE TEND TO SEE WHAT WE EXPECT TO SEE AND ARE SLOW TO ACCEPT CHALLENGES TO OUR PRECONCEIVED ASSUMPTIONS. THE TOWNSPEOPLE EXPECT TO SEE THE JESUS THEY HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN, THE ONE WHO SEEMS NO DIFFERENT FROM THEM. WHEN JESUS PREACHES WITH WISDOM AND PERFORMS DEEDS OF POWER, THE PEOPLE CANNOT SEE BEYOND THEIR OWN LIMITED VIEW OF HIM. GET BACK IN YOUR LANE, JESUS.

ACCORDING TO MARK, IT IS JESUS’S OWN COMMUNITY—HIS VERY OWN *FAITH* COMMUNITY---THAT FAILS TO RECOGNIZE THE TRUTH OF WHO HE IS. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US, THE CHURCH? HOW, WHEN, AND WHERE DO WE MISS OUT ON THE SACRED BECAUSE WE EXPECT GOD TO STAY IN HIS LANE? WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOD SHOWS UP UNEXPECTEDLY? REMEMBER, IN OUR GOSPEL STORY IT IS NOT THOSE WHO ARE ENCOUNTERING JESUS FOR THE FIRST TIME BUT THOSE WHO HAVE KNOWN HIM FOR YEARS WHO ARE ASKING THE SAME QUESTION ABOUT JESUS’ IDENTITY AND RESPONDING TO HIS TEACHING WITH AMAZEMENT.

THE MIRACLE OF THE INCARNATION AND RESURRECTION IS PRECISELY THAT JESUS DOESN’T STAY IN HIS LANE. GOD EXCEEDS, GOD ABOUND. GOD TRANSCENDS. LOWLY CARPENTER REVEALS HIMSELF AS LORD. THE MAN WITH THE QUESTIONABLE BIRTH STORY OFFERS US SALVATION. THE HOMETOWN PROPHET TELLS US TRUTHS WE’D RATHER NOT HEAR. WE MIGHT BE UPSET BY HIS LANE-CROSSING, BUT HE’S NOT.

THE STORY OF JESUS’S OWN REJECTION IN HIS HOMETOWN SETS UP THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE DISCIPLES. THE REASON FOR MARK’S INCLUSION OF JESUS’ EMBARRASSING EXPERIENCE AT NAZARETH AT THIS PARTICULAR POINT IN THE GOSPEL APPEARS TO BE THE PREPARATION OF THE TWELVE FOR WHAT MIGHT BE A MIXED RECEPTION. THE DISCIPLES ARE WARNED: “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.”

MY THIRD OF YEAR SEMINARY I DID AN INTERNSHIP IN A SMALL NEBRASKA COMMUNITY AND THE GOSPEL READING FOR MY FIRST SUNDAY IN THE PULPIT WAS TODAY’S READING

FROM MARK. BUT LET ME BACK UP AND TELL YOU ABOUT MY FIRST WEEK AT THE CHURCH. MY FIRST WEEK INCLUDED A WORKSHOP FOR CHURCH STAFFS IN LINCOLN, NE., SO THE SENIOR PASTOR, CHURCH SECRETARY AND MYSELF ATTENDED AND ON THE WAY HOME WE DROPPED THE SENIOR PASTOR OFF AT CHURCH CAMP. THE FINAL STRETCH HOME FOUND ME AND THE CHURCH SECRETARY, MARION, IN THE FRONT SEAT. TWO STRANGERS GETTING BETTER ACQUAINTED....A NEW FRIEND, SOMEONE I WOULD BE INTERACTING WITH ON A DAILY BASIS. SOMEWHERE ALONG THAT LONELY STRETCH OF NEBRASKA HIGHWAY, MARION (WHO WAS DRIVING) REACHED OVER, PATTED MY KNEE, AND SAID, "NOW, WHAT I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU, DON'T TAKE PERSONALLY." SHE THEN PROCEEDED TO INFORM ME THAT THE CHURCH HAD NEVER HAD A WOMAN PASTOR, NOT EVEN A WOMAN USHER, AND "A LOT OF" MEMBERS WERE WONDERING IF MY HUSBAND COULD TAKE MY CALL AND BE THE PASTORJ BECAUSE NOBODY WOULD SHOW UP ON THE SUNDAYS I PREACHED.

I WAS STUNNED INTO SILENCE AND DON'T REMEMBER MUCH MORE OF THE CONVERSATION AFTER THAT. ONCE HOME I TOLD MARTY WITH INTENSE URGENCY WE NEEDED TO PACK UP AND MOVE BACK TO DENVER WHERE I WAS ATTENDING SEMINARY.

SIX DAYS AFTER MY CONVERSATION WITH MARION I PREACHED MY FIRST SERMON AND READ THESE WORDS FROM MARK: "WHENEVER YOU ENTER A HOUSE, STAY THERE UNTIL YOU LEAVE THE PLACE. IF ANY PLACE 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 WHAT DID I PREACH? SIMPLE WORDS ABOUT THE LITTLE CONGREGATION IN RAPID CITY THAT INTRODUCED ME TO JESUS, YEARS AT CHURCH CAMP, ANSWERING THE CALL TO FULL TIME MINISTRY. I PREACHED FROM MY HEART THAT SUNDAY. I WASN'T ATTEMPTING TO GET THE CONGREGATION ON MY SIDE OR EVEN TO LIKE ME. I SIMPLY SHARED MY STORY OF HOW MUCH JESUS MEANT TO ME. I REMEMBER BEING NERVOUS AND SURPRISED THAT ANYONE HAD SHOWN UP SINCE THEY DIDN'T LIKE WOMEN PASTORS. BUT I LEARNED AN IMPORTANT LESSON...I DIDN'T NEED POLISHED WORDS, OR A SOPHISTICATED THEOLOGY TO TALK ABOUT MY FAITH. I WAS SIMPLY CALLED TO SPEAK TRUTH IN LOVE, FROM MY HEART, IN MY OWN WORDS, AND TO NEVER BE ASHAMED. I WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANYONE'S RESPONSE TO MY CALL TO MINISTRY, BUT I WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR SHARING MY FAITH.

THAT STILL HOLDS TRUE...ALL THESE YEARS LATER....A TRUTH FOR EACH OF US. WE NEED NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT TALKING ABOUT OUR FAITH OR WORRY ABOUT FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS. WE ARE DISCIPLES OF JESUS...SENT OUT WITH HIS AUTHORITY TO PROCLAIM HIS POWER AND LOVE. WITH SUCH ASSURANCE, MAY WE WITNESS BOLDLY AND FAITHFULLY, ALWAYS SPEAKING IN LOVE AND FROM THE HEART. AMEN.