

"There's No Place Like Home!"

+ 6 Pentecost +

Ezekiel 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

July 5, 2015

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this morning's message are the lessons for this day.

This whole weekend families have gathered across the country – sons and daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles cousins, family friends to eat charred meat or gluten free veggie burgers, get sunburned and mosquito bitten to celebrate our nation's independence and just to be together. There's no place like home or the lake or wherever you can be surrounded by those you hold dear. Certainly, for Rabbi Jesus who had been off teaching and making quite a name for Himself healing the sick and raising the dead his return to nowhere Nazareth, his boyhood home, should have been an amazing celebration but it ended up like oh-too-many reunions by going suddenly sour turning the joyful, "There's no place like home!" into "THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME – GET ME OUTA HERE!"

Coming to Nazareth in time for worship at the synagogue Jesus claimed the privilege of reading the Scriptures on the Sabbath day, but then He went on to do what very few Jewish men did and that is, He taught them from the Scriptures – gave a sermon; apparently a pretty good teaching message because, according to Mark, many who heard Him were "astounded/astonished". That, as opposed to mostly awake and not nodding is a reaction all preachers would revel in, but rarely get. If the gospel stopped right there and said no more, it would have been like a Norman Rockwell painting with smiling faces, astounded looks, the hometown boy basking in the glow of admiration from all who'd known him way back when.

But within a few short sentences, what began as "astounding" turned into "they took offense at Him." The Greek word for that is **eskandalizonto**, from which we get the word "scandalized," and literally means a "stumbling block" or a "rock in the road" – the kind where

you majorly stub your toe, fall and cut yourself or end up with big bruises. More on that in a minute but first doesn't it seem odd to you how people can move so easily and so quickly from being astounded to being scandalized and offended? Oh, wait, it could have something to do with talking about politics and religion. You see, the Jewish nation was longing for Messiah to come – a strong and mighty ruler who would free them from their Roman oppressors and establish their kingdom as supreme throughout all the world. For them politics and religion were one – no separation of church and state like we have in these United States.

While Mark's account is rather spare in details what seems to have happened was the very natural ability all people of all time to doubt a very apparent truth that is placed right in front of them. Jesus had just raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. A woman who had bled for 12 years was healed by simply touching the hem of His garment. He was teaching from God's Holy Word with an authority and wisdom that left them dumbfounded and then in doubt.

It was, quite simply beyond their human comprehension, beyond the faith they had in God's covenant to send them the Messiah that Jesus could, in fact, be the Messiah. They could not by faith believe that the teaching they'd heard and the wonders done by his healing hands were done by God's Messiah because they had been done by this homegrown carpenter they'd known since he was a boy following Joseph and covered in sawdust; the son of Mary, the brother of James, Joses, Juda and Simon as well as unnamed sisters. They could not believe what became the earliest Creed of the Christian church – they could not, would not believe that “Jesus is Lord” – Jesus is God/Incarnate/Holy/Immutable/of the same essence and being as God/one with the Father and the Spirit.

Using their own reason and strength they came to the conclusion: “we know this guy; we know His family; we know He's a carpenter, so where does He get off astonishing us with words and deeds of which He ought not be capable, because, after all, He is just human, just dust like the rest of us?” And they were scandalized, offended, that an apparently ordinary appearing man who grew up among them, could be more than what met their eyes.

Eskandalizontoed – the whole crowd of them! They were not about to be bruised,

battered or wounded by tripping over this rock in the road. They weren't going to change their course and turn in a whole new direction – following Jesus. No, they would stay with what they knew. Hope for God's fulfillment but not trust that it had come to them in Jesus. Ah how simple they and we are – made of dust, after all, the dust from which we will return. Jesus, in understanding says, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."

So Jesus moves on. He teaches in other villages and sends out the disciples in pairs, gives them authority over unclean spirits and they go out to preach repentance, shaking off the unworthy dust from their feet of those who would not believe, would not turn to God.

Repentance – that is the place where we, people of dust, meet our God in the dust---the dust and ashes of repentance, the dust of guilt, clinging so tenaciously that only the miraculous washing of baptism can scrub us clean. I know the date of my baptism but I don't remember it. I was only 2 days old, my Aunt Ruthie held me – I don't know who was holding my twin brother, Richard, who was dying. Back at home on 17th street by Rufus King High School in Milwaukee my older siblings were no doubt missing our mother, alternately getting along and not getting along at all, as siblings do, and completely unaware that their twin brothers had just been claimed as sons of God and heirs for eternity of the riches of God's grace. The **Eskandalizonto** or scandal in all of this is that God would choose such a messy world, such a gritty, grimy, humanity and such ordinary conditions to come among us, not to dazzle us but to save us, because saving is what God does best and saving is what we need most.

Well, let me turn then for just a minute or two to the second half of the Gospel---the part about being sent. Whether two by two as He sent out the twelve or any other number you choose, you and I have been given a mission to accomplish---to take that **good word, "repentance"** whether its welcomed or not, to a world that is ready or not or willing or not to turn and face our Creator. Earlier this morning we asked God to "Give us the courage you gave the apostles that we may faithfully witness to your love and peace in every circumstance of life" and gathered here and most certainly as soon as we walk out that door, that is our task. Maybe like Ezekiel we're going to run right into the impudent and stubborn. Maybe like Jesus, those whom we'd

wish were closest to us will be offended by us. Or, maybe (because only God knows) maybe like those twelve, the peace we bring in the name of Jesus, will find homes and hearts ready to receive it. What we are called to do is to love, to live lives and give witness that turns people to God in repentance, to Jesus in the certain faith that He is Lord so that called by the Holy Spirit they will come into God's family – the only place where there is “No Place Like Home” for now and for eternity. Amen.

Now may God's peace that passes all understanding, given to us in the covenant of baptism lead us to proclaim the coming of God's Kingdom. AMEN.