

Sermon for Pentecost V  
July 5, 2009  
Mark 6:1-13

Father's Day is one of those days that I look forward to every year. This year the kids got a card for me that tells an interesting story. It has a picture of little girl covering her eyes with the caption, "Is he dancing now? I can't look." It's amazing how easy it is embarrass our children. We worked hard to do so on our trip to DC. Denise purchased these patriotic t-shirts for us to wear for a photo op in Washington for our Christmas card. In order to get the opportunity for a photo, you have to actually wear the shirt. In fact all of us needed to wear the shirt at the same time, all day, out in public and every thing. We got some looks and even a few interesting comments. Wearing the shirt could either be a matter of, "We're proud to be a part of this family." Or I'm ashamed that we are so dorky as to wear matching t-shirts. Please don't make us do this!

When we are planning to be with people we haven't seen for a while, we have certain expectations. We were at my hometown last weekend. My very simple expectation was to attend my 25<sup>th</sup> class reunion from Unity High School, to meet a prospective brother-in-law who was coming home with my little sister, and to preach at St. Andrew Lutheran in Niagara, the congregation where I was baptized, confirmed, and ordained. I expected that the rest of the days from Thursday to Tuesday would be spent relaxing and enjoying family and to possibly make a quick trip to Clearbrook, MN to visit my 96 year-old Grandmother. All of those things happened except relaxing part.

I didn't expect to be in the basement of the Eagle Crest for a half hour during my class reunion because of threatening weather. I didn't expect to spend Saturday and half of Monday clearing the tree that had fallen in front of my parent's house, roughly where our van had been parked, while we were at the reunion. I didn't expect to spend all of Monday afternoon snaking the drains in my parent's home to clear what turned out to be a clogged pipe near the septic tank. An unexpected turn of events can certainly have a bearing on relationships.

Things don't always go as we expect, whether it is with family members, or when we return to our home town for a visit.

Mark opens the text for this morning by telling us that Jesus is going home. The last time Jesus was home, it was in a situation of conflict. Jesus was surrounded by a crowd of people so large that he wasn't even able to eat. His immediate family came to seize him by force, telling others that he was "out of his mind" (3:21). Most families have them, one of those relatives who is just a little off. They say and do things that just don't make sense. When they show up at an event, you silently scream, "Who invited him? Maybe he'll just stay in the corner and not bother anyone." That's what Jesus' family thought of him during his last visit. They were ashamed of him. Can't he just be quiet and not make a spectacle of himself?

Now, we don't know for sure how many times Jesus tried to teach in His hometown during His ministry. What we do know is that every time the Bible tells of His ministry in Nazareth, it does not go well. In fact, the Gospel of Luke [4:16-30] indicates that the people of Nazareth tried to kill Him on one of His attempts to bring the Good News to Nazareth. Have you ever wondered why the people in Nazareth rejected Jesus? Jesus was popular everywhere He went. People brought the sick, the lame, the unclean, even the dead, and Jesus healed them. You would think that the Nazareth officials would want to give Him the first century equivalent of the "key to the city."

Instead, He gets abuse. Instead of being proud of their local boy made good, they asked, "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?" And they took offense at him. They were so offended that only a few people brought sick and injured people for healing so that He could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. How sad! Even Jesus marveled because of their unbelief.

And yet, Jesus doesn't despair or quit His ministry because the locals reject Him. He does the most amazing thing. In the face of opposition, Jesus takes his disciples, the people he earlier called family, and sends them out to do the work of His Father in mission. You might say this was the first vicarage program in the church. They go out with virtually nothing but the Word, and yet they do the work of God. The Father sends Jesus, Jesus makes people members of God's family, and Jesus sends them out to do His Father's work.

Here we see that Jesus is not limited by family relationships. Instead, by His Word and His work, He creates them. He brings people into the family of God. By his life, death, and resurrection, he makes people members of His kingdom, children of his heavenly Father, and He sends them out in the Spirit to do the Father's work. This is the good news of the text: Jesus makes people part of God's family. It was good news back then, and it is good news today.

Consider your family relationships. If you were to be very honest in describing your family relationships, there might be some things you would rather not bring up. You might be ashamed to talk about a life-long conflict between you and your mother, tension with your children at home; cohabitation, along with physical or chemical abuse.

When I take couples through pre-marriage counseling, we talk about their family of origin. In many cases there is much hurt expressed over what might be called abusive behaviors. There are power plays and neglect and sometimes even physical abuse. It is important to acknowledge the hurts of the past in order to build healthier relationships in the future. The key is to recognize that no matter what our family of origin looks like, our gracious Lord loves us unconditionally and joyously welcomes us into His family.

Sometimes we forget that as we reach out with the message of Christ. Because of a person's background or how they look or act or smell, we conclude that they are not worthy to receive Christ's love. We don't engage in relationships with people who are different from us because we conclude that they are not worthy of us. Thankfully, this is not the same attitude that Christ has toward us.

The key to welcome comes back to something that the disciples did as Jesus sent them out in pairs. “They went out and proclaimed that people should repent.” It’s as true today as it was when Jesus walked the earth. We can certainly see evidence of sin all around us. People reject the person of Christ and the work of Christ because they have not yet come to the conclusion that they need Him. We live in an age where there are no absolutes. Everything is relative. Don’t tell me that what I am doing is wrong, even if God’s Word clearly says it.

There are also times when we are ashamed to be a part of the family of God. To be a Christian means that we desire to grow in our knowledge of and in our relationship with Christ. You may have read through the Bible several times in your life. And yet, every time you open Holy Scripture, the Spirit of God is at work, convicting us of sin and cleansing us with the precious, saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. You might think it’s just not worth it to grow in faith or to lead a Christ-centered life. What difference will it make?

In spite of the world’s opposition, Jesus does not stop offering His gifts. He continued to send His disciples out to prepare the way for His ministry even though He knew they would experience opposition. He gave them the authority to bless those who received them and the authority to shake the dust off their feet against those who did not. The Lord did not withhold His gifts just because His disciples would experience rejection.

Jesus still offers those gifts today. When Jesus died on the cross, He did not die for nice people. He died for sinners. Since the Bible tells us that [Romans 3:23] all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, that means He died for everybody. He died for those who rejected Him in Nazareth and He died for those who still reject Him today. He offers His gifts to all, even those who reject Him time and time again.

Jesus loves you. He wants you to know about Him. He has given the church the command to teach the nations to hold fast to ALL the things that He taught. We have an amazing message to proclaim. Youth from Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ will be here this week to help us tell that message to our neighbors. Consider joining them in going to tell the Good News. Take advantage of this command. Learn about the Christ who loves you and gave Himself into death for you. Learn about the savior who delights in giving you the things that are best for you. Learn about a Lord who rose from the dead in order to give you the promise of eternal life.

Maybe you are considered the black sheep of your family. They are embarrassed to be in your presence. I have good news for you. There is now nothing that can separate you from God's family. In Jesus, all of your sins have been forgiven. Through baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus, you become a part of the family of God. Today we eat at the table with brothers and sisters in Christ, the life-giving meal of His Body and Blood that forgives us and sustains in this wonderful family, created and established by God for eternity.