

**“Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown”
from The Gospel of Mark 6:1-6**

Good morning, Everyone. It’s good to see you all. Will you pray with me?

God, thank you so much for being with us this morning. We feel your presence in this place. What a gift it is to be here with this wonderful community of believers. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, God of Love. Amen.

I have to say, before I begin, that I am honored and grateful, to find myself in this pulpit, in this beautiful, awesome, sacred space I’ve known since childhood, since before I can remember. I want to thank Tracey, thank you all, for giving me this opportunity to preach today and to serve the Chapel this summer.

In last week’s reading, from The Gospel of Mark, Chapter 5, Jesus’ final words were an invitation of sorts, a command really, to a recently deceased 12 year old girl, “Talitha kum” in Aramaic – which translates as “Little girl, get up!” Or as our former Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori paraphrases it, “Get up, Girl! You’re not dead yet!”. At Jesus’ words, the girl is restored to life. That’s a demonstration of a lot of power!

But this week’s reading from the Gospel of Mark brings us to a very different place, a very different experience for Jesus. An experience of rejection and disbelief in his hometown of Nazareth. Now, the irony is not lost on me that that I’m intending to talk today about Jesus’

experience of rejection by people who had known him since he was a child. So let's just say, I've been praying for a slightly better reception this morning.

After months of travelling around, preaching and teaching, with a lot of success, Jesus and his disciples arrive in his hometown. His kinfolk and townspeople had to have heard about his growing reputation for powerful teaching and healing. Jesus has exorcised demons, healed the sick, raised a girl from the dead, calmed a storm at sea. He's earned the trust of twelve loyal disciples. He has widely proclaimed a new understanding of God's kingdom, and a movement of radical inclusion and justice is coalescing around him. He has become, in other words, a hometown boy made good. Or so he, and we, might have expected.

But instead his kinfolk, his townspeople reject him. They begin to cut him down, to undermine him. They question his authority and legitimacy as a teacher, a preacher. They revive questions that have followed him around all his life about his uncertain parentage, which they use as a weapon against him, to shame and silence him. These people he is related to, the people who have known him his whole life dismiss his teaching and ridicule him, to one another and behind his back. They aren't amazed, they aren't inspired, they aren't moved or changed.

Understandably, their reaction to his message and his presence comes as a shock and a disappointment to Jesus. The Gospel tells us, "He was amazed at their unbelief."

The Gospel doesn't tell us why the people of his village don't accept him and his teaching as so many others, in so many other places, have. Maybe they still see him as an annoying, inquisitive, precocious boy in the village, always asking questions, pushing people's buttons by being too direct or uncomfortably honest. Maybe they worry that his notoriety will bring trouble, or mayhem, or unwanted attention their way. Or maybe in a social system where a person's status was fixed at birth, they simply couldn't conceive of someone like Jesus — a simple carpenter of questionable parentage — amounting to anything significant special. Or maybe they were jealous that this carpenter man seemed to have turned into a scholar, a teacher, maybe even a prophet. They may have had any number of reasons for rejecting the teacher, the rabbi Jesus.

We don't know why; we just know they did. And they seem to want him to remember his place and **get back in it**; to stop being so dramatic and stop drawing so much attention to himself. Their message to Jesus is essentially "Get back in your place, boy! Who do you think you are?!"

Jesus' responds by saying, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." In other words, though he's highly regarded and sought after elsewhere, he realizes that his hometown folks can't make room for the change in him, for his growth and development, for his evolving understanding of his mission and calling, for his transformation.

The great tragedy of this story, I believe, is that the townspeople's suspicion, resentment, and rejection of Jesus actually diminished his

ability to work good on their behalf. “He could do no deed of power there,” the author of the Gospel wrote with grim regret, “except curing a few sick people with his healing power.” The small-mindedness of the people of Nazareth, their lack of trust, and their inability to embrace Jesus's teaching and mission kept them from receiving the benefit of his power to heal and teach.

Furthermore, they missed the presence of God in their midst. Which got me thinking about how often do we do this too? How often I've done it. How often do we choose not to recognize God speaking in our lives, finding it easier and more straightforward to go with the flow of post-Christendom secular culture, oriented more toward logic, science, and reason, rather than mystery, faith, and the divine. Maybe sometimes we are more comfortable with a “splendid, transcendent—and distant—God than the wild and unpredictable Incarnate Word alive among us”¹.

But in saying that “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house” I think Jesus is also preparing his disciples for what he is about to do next – and how hard it's going to be. He is preparing to send them out in pairs, to extend the reach of his mission; to drive out demons and heal the sick; to preach in order to change people's hearts and minds, to encourage repentance, and bring about fundamental changes in people's behavior. Jesus is letting his disciples know that the task he is about to give them is a difficult one; that they won't always be welcomed, believed, or taken seriously, especially among people who

knew them before they started following Jesus. He is painting them a picture of what discipleship looks like.

The thing is, WE are called into discipleship too, through baptism and through God's active presence in our lives.

I've been thinking a lot about discipleship this week? And I wonder what discipleship means to you? What beliefs or actions the word 'disciple' conjure up for you? I'm pretty sure each and every one of you is already manifesting discipleship, both in ways you're aware of and ways you might not see as discipleship. And I'd love to talk with any of you who might be interested in an exchange of ideas about that, if you'd be interested.

The implications for those who hear and read the Gospel should be clear. Jesus' disciples – and that includes you and me - are not passive beneficiaries of the teaching of Jesus; they, and we, have been given a mandate to witness and to heal, to challenge injustice, to embrace the outcast, to defend the marginalized, to stand up for the weak and the oppressed. To be truth tellers in a community that doesn't always want to hear the truth. But the role isn't easy and some rejection is very likely. And still, we are called to do it.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.