

First United Methodist Church

Sermon by Rev. Mara Bailey
Nebraska Wesleyan University Minister

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A place where time stands still...parents or grandparent's house? A family or school reunion?

I'm sure you have heard the saying: "**familiarity breeds contempt**"? In this passage from Mark, Jesus certainly experiences the brunt of this saying - and perhaps it was the case that in his hometown, time stood still.

Jesus is bringing his ministry home, to the place where he was from. Don't we wish that the people of his hometown would have such pride in their local product? Don't we wish that they would have been astounded at his works? Instead of being dubious, they would have been amazed, and supportive, and flocked to the synagogue to hear him preach? Instead, we have a room full of doubters.

"Familiarity breeds contempt", as the old saying goes... It's not that they thought Jesus was teaching false things...it's that they didn't understand how it was that Jesus could be doing these things. They had in their minds a particular image of Jesus and who he should be-and could not adjust that image to accept who Jesus was, as he stood before them.

This is one of those times in the gospels when we are faced with the **full humanity and full divinity of Jesus Christ**.

His hometown could not believe that Jesus - Mary's son, the carpenter - would be given the power from God to do these things. At first they are captivated by the one who stands before them-where did he learn these things? What is this he can do?" but then the familiarity strikes-and they move to contempt. **Wait a minute.. . we know this man.**

He is Mary's son (normally identified by the Father's side...), the son of a carpenter - he's one of us, in other words - NOT a miracle worker. They are confronted with the issue of power - where did this Power come from? Should Jesus have the power to do these things, they ask? No, is the answer they settle on... not realizing that Jesus had begun his ministry filled with the power from God his Father.

Jesus moved on...he called his twelve disciples to follow him and begin to move among the people. He told them that if they experienced what he had just experienced - a negative response to his work and his words - they are to shake it off - literally - shake the dust from their feet - and move along.

I want to bring this scripture home to you today by relating this to my work with students across the street, at NWU. They say that a job becomes a passion, a vocation if you will, when you would willingly do it without being paid.

There is a piece of my job that always rings true with this-when I get to be involved in the work of DISCERNMENT with students.

Discernment: in a spiritual sense, this is the PROCESS of determining what God's desire might be for you in a particular situation or in your life.

I see this happening with students when they are REMOVED from their old lives...this is why the process of discerning happens so frequently and so easily with students. but it should be happening with all of us!

Discernment: happens when we are removed from the day to day and challenged with the possibilities of new things. Happens when we seriously consider in our lives, what does God have for us? What does God want us to do? How does God want us to respond?

In a way, this is what Jesus was asking as he preached in the synagogue. Now, we don't know the exact words he was saying, but based on his ministry-the types of people he stayed with, the types of people he healed, the types of people who flocked to him - **we know that he was challenging the people with how they responded to God's call.**

How are we to treat the needy among us, he might have asked? How are we to treat the ones we cast out of the city limits? This was a true challenge to them-and it was a true challenge to the powers of Jesus' day. And Jesus learned a valuable lesson as he taught this in his hometown. Jesus learned what he could and what he couldn't control. He learned that he could control what he said, how he said it, what he did, and where he went. He could not control how the people responded-and whether or not they'd accept his message.

What can we control? What CAN'T we control? We can control how we live, how we act, what we say...we can control whether or not we start each day trusting in our own devices or trusting in God.

We can control whether we choose to hold on to all that we have been given, or if we want to share it with those in the community who are in need. However. What we cannot control is how people respond. This is what Jesus illustrates in this passage. He had faith in what God had equipped him to do... the people of his hometown did not have the same faith in him. So how did he respond? He continued in what he had been called to do. He called the disciples to join him in this work, and then he told them to continue on. But He didn't just say go - he took some time to explain how they were to prepare, and how they were equipped.

When you prepare for a trip, how do you pack? If you're like me, you overpack. Endlessly frustrating for my husband, who seems to be able to live out of a backpack for 2 weeks. Gets even worse when you throw a baby into the mix...it's a wonder babies even survive these days with all the stuff we think they require! I would not have done well with Jesus' instructions to his disciples. Jesus is very clear in his instructions for preparation - don't take anything with you but a stick! Do not take what you think you might need for your journey. No extra clothes. No food, no money.

Take a staff. (for protection? who knows) I am reading between the lines here, but this is what I hear next: Trust in what I have tasked you with. Trust that I have equipped you for this journey, and that the people you meet along the way will meet your physical needs - food, housing, clothing, rest.

There is a saying I recently learned that I love to share: God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called. We have seen countless examples of God living out this motto in the

Bible. Take one of those examples: Moses and the burning bush. God has asked Moses to do a great (life-threatening?) thing - go to Pharaoh on behalf of the Hebrew people... asks how he will be given authority. God -well ...what do you have around you? What do you have in your hand? A stick? We can make that work... let's see... throw that on the ground and yeah, it will become a snake!

Moses: but who should I say sent me? God: I am... God! I don't even have to say God! Just say I am! Moses tried to tell God he wasn't ready for the task - I don't speak well, the people won't believe I was sent by you. But God asks him to do something simple: look down in your hand.

If we are honestly involved in the work of discernment-asking questions about what God might have us do in our lives-and we begin to make the protests: This isn't the right time. God, just wait until I finish _____. Not enough money. What will my family think? When that track begins to play in your head, perhaps the best thing to do is stop, and look around you. What gifts has God already given you, that can be put to use? Look down at your hands: what are they capable of? Maybe as we consider our own journeys, and we wonder if we're equipped, all we need to do is look down at our hands... what do you have in your hands? What do you have at your disposal, that might need to be re-imagined as a tool of God's? The Message version of vs. 7-8:

⁷Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil

opposition. He sent them off with these instructions: Don't think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. You are the equipment.

As you consider what journey you might be called out on, let us use this scripture as an act of preparation. Let us remember that there are things we can control - and things that we can't. As followers of Jesus, we know that we are called - but to what? The answers aren't often easily found - or easily digested. What the process requires is Trust. Trust in God, Trust in the process. Trust that God is in the process, that God is a part of your journey. Trust that if God is calling you to something, God has equipped you with whatever is necessary to begin. Trust that you are the equipment.