

**Christ Lutheran Church Pentecost 7 7/7/2024**

**“The Downs and Ups of Following Jesus—When You Hit a Wall” Mark 6:1-13**

After a long, hard week of productive work, Jesus came back home. Back to His hometown, back to familiar roads and buildings and people. Back to the place where everybody knew everybody, and everybody knew everybody’s business.

The last time we have record of Jesus being home, things were a little weird. Huge crowds followed Him there to hear Him speak and to see if He would do anything miraculous, but His family tried to pull Him away from the crowds because they thought that He was, as it says in Mark chapter 3, “out of His mind.” At one point while His family was away, Jesus hosted a gathering of anyone interested inside of their home. It was so crowded that when His family returned, they couldn’t even get in, causing them to send a messenger in to say, “Hey, Jesus! It’s us, your mother and brothers, and we sure wouldn’t mind being able to get into our house!” To which Jesus responded, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around Him, He said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Yeah, so like I said, things were a little weird back in Mark chapter 3. Jesus not only caused quite a stir which brought in unwelcome crowds, but He also essentially disavowed all of His blood ties to His family. And here in Mark chapter 6, Jesus returns to His hometown, where the people who listen to Him in the synagogue (people who know all about His and His family’s business) respond to His teaching with astonishment. I’m not so sure they were that astonished with the teaching - although coming from Jesus we know it was authoritative and true; I believe they were mostly astonished because it was Jesus who was delivering the teaching. It’s as if they were saying, “He’s just one of us. We watched Him grow up. We know His Mom and Dad and brothers and sisters. He was just a carpenter, wasn’t He? What’s going on?” And perhaps being informed by His previous homecoming, they were a little hesitant to embrace Him or His message, and instead, as the text says, they took offense at Him.

Have you ever tried to convince somebody to change their mind when they have already made up their mind? No matter how many convincing facts are laid out in front of them, there is absolutely no movement. In Jesus’ case here in Mark chapter 6, no matter how much teaching or how many miracles He laid before them, it would be like running into a wall, which had to be mystifying to Jesus, I’m sure. Why would anyone close their mind and heart to the loving and forgiving grace of God? One of my former Seminary Professors calls this “The Inexplicable Weirdness of Unbelief.” All of these good things God wants to give to people, and people still wall Him off and turn their backs on Him. What did Jesus do in response to that in His hometown? We are told that “He marveled because of their unbelief.”

But that’s not all He did. Sure, He could have stopped there and given up, maybe even sought out another line of work - after all, He did have some pretty decent carpentry skills. But no . . . you see Jesus wasn’t just some self-appointed prophet or teacher whose definition of success was measured by immediate influence and impact. This was the Son of God in the flesh, who was able to see the wall in front of Him for what it was in the long haul - not something to knock over or

push through - but an opportunity to change over the course of time through intentional love and care and continued pointing to God's plan.

It's pretty much the same thing He has done with each one of us. In spite of our sin-filled opposition to God and His will, Jesus wasn't willing to give up on us. Sure, with some of us it took longer than others, but He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish. And so with some, He was happy to bring us along into His kingdom at our early baptisms, and continue to build that relationship through His teaching over time. And with others, He didn't force Himself in, but over time and through experiences and relationships, He softened us to His love and grace and embraced us as His loved children. That's kind of how I see Him looking at the response from His hometown. Sure, they were pushing Him away at that point, but that didn't mean they would push Him away forever.

And so, after marveling at their unbelief, what does He do? The next line in the text says, "*And He went about among the villages teaching.*" The mission didn't stop with His hometown. There were many others who needed to hear what God had done for them to reconcile them to Himself through the forgiveness of sins. And while He left those He loved for a moment, He trusted that there would be other experiences and relationships coming their way down the road that might just help to bring down the wall.

I remember the story told to me by my first Music Minister ever. He was a teacher and the Music Director at my home church in Torrance, California. He shared with me and a small group of folks one day how his sister was not a follower of Jesus, but that He prayed everyday for her to come to believe in Him and trust Him for her salvation. He said He had done this for 20 years, and one day during that 20th year his sister became a Christian. It wasn't his influence in her life that was primary in her conversion; it was God using other relationships and experiences to bring her to the point that she no longer said "No" to Jesus. The wall was strong and real for so many years, but with God, nothing is impossible.

After being shunned by His hometown, Jesus goes to whoever is next, and entrusts those He loves to God's desire to save all people. He entrusts His message of love and grace to His disciples, who scatter through the towns and villages to share it with whoever will listen. Some of those are brought to faith through the message; others say "No" to the message. But that didn't mean God was done with them. Those who were brought to faith would grow in the sharing of that faith, and those who said "No" were never taken off of God's radar.

You and I can thank God that He never gave up on us! He has brought us to faith in Jesus through the Holy Spirit and has delivered forgiveness of sins and eternal life to us. You may know some "hometown" folks in your life who have placed up some pretty unscalable walls. You may have tried to ram through them or you may have simply given up trying to make any inroads. Remember the bigger picture: God loves them just as much as He loves you, and will continue to use experiences and relationships to drop the walls and draw them to Himself. Jesus lived and died and rose for them; God will never give up. Amen.