

Sermon: Pentecost 7

Mr. Evans DeVries

July 8, 2018

Year B

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

Psalm 48

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Mark 6:1-13

I have heard it said that no matter what you believe to be true about the human condition, no matter what you think it is like to be human, you probably think that you can find your beliefs written down, and thereby validated, in either the Bible, the works of Shakespeare or the United States Constitution. Certainly the thought that dominates the first part of today's gospel is such a truth, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house. I don't believe that there is anyone who hasn't had their opinion dismissed by acquaintances, friends or family because those folks KNOW that there's no way that you know ANYTHING about the subject at hand. I think that is why the statement resonates so well. We have all experienced it. The comedian Rodney Dangerfield made a career in comedy with the famous paraphrasing of today's opening thought. "I tell ya', folks, I get no respect."

Of course, in the time of Christ it was a bit more complicated than in Dangerfield's time, or ours. Emerson Powery, Professor of Biblical Studies at Messiah College in Grantham, PA reminds us that Jesus lived in a Honor/Shame society. Honor was then, and perhaps still is, although maybe to a lesser degree in our day, a finite thing. There was only so much honor to be distributed. If this newcomer is to be honored, then some current holder of honor has to loose at least some of his or hers. Since we are talking about a newcomer to the area of teaching and preaching, who, then is going to lose this honor? Why, none other than Jesus's rivals for the hearts and minds of the people: the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious leaders who are already threatened by him and see him as a growing threat. Also, among those who loose status by comparison are the former neighbors of Jesus. Before, they were all more or less equal or, perhaps, the neighbors were even superior to Jesus on the Honor Scale. Now, Jesus is increasing in status in the greater community. His new status is drawn from all of them, collectively,

or, worse perhaps more is taken from some specific individuals. As a result, insults are thrown around amongst the neighbors. These seem to “go for the throat” in some cases, referencing, for example, the nature of Jesus birth (from their limited perspective) when they mention his mother and siblings, but fail to mention Joseph, at all. I do understand this can work in the reverse, too.

Twenty years ago, I tore my rotator cuff. I chose to consult with my best friend from high school, who was, at that time, on his way to becoming the senior orthopedic surgeon at Spectrum Hospital. I must admit that I thought long and hard before opting to trust my friend with the operation. I know what stuff we did in high school, I was there for all the dumb things! Later, after I was involved in a catastrophic car wreck that totaled my wife’s minivan (that was the catastrophe part), I had to have neck surgery. After the operation, I was unable to lift my arm, just as I was with the injured rotator cuff. I went back to my high school friend. He told me the neurosurgeon had nicked the nerve and I would be fine in two months. I did ask the neurosurgeon about it and he said (probably fearing a malpractice suit) that I shouldn’t believe the orthopedic surgeon. At that moment, I realized that I had recognized my friend’s authority, in that area, at least. “Authority” is mentioned several time in scripture in relation to Jesus’s teaching, beginning with his first reported teaching in the temple in Jerusalem, when he was a child. It is mentioned several other times as well. it is my suspicion that “authority” is what leads to “honor” and respect.

Today’s reading goes on to mention something that I found strange. Perhaps you thought so, too. It says that while he was in Nazareth Jesus “could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.” First off, curing a few sick people seems very good to me, and I’m relatively sure those who received the cure were pretty glad to have it, as well. This scenario reminds me of a movie that I saw years ago. It was called Little Big Man and it stared Dustin Hoffman as a white child who was adopted by and grew up living with Indians in the Old West. Hoffman’s adopted grandfather, “Old Lodgeskins”, finally had lived out his years. As he

is now blind, he asks his grandson, Hoffman, to take him up to the place on the mountain where their people go to die. After sitting in silence for some time, the blind Indian asks, "Am I still in this world?" Hoffman says that he is. "Well", the old Indian says, "Some times the magic works, sometimes it doesn't" So, is that what we have here, today, in scripture? Is this just one of those days when the magic doesn't work? It sure doesn't look like it to me, based on what follows. Verse 7 says "he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." Verse 13 says, "They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. It sounds, to me, like the 'magic' was working very well.

So what, then, is going on with the problem of Jesus's apparent limitation of power? David Lose, former President of Lutheran Seminary, suggests that the failure of Jesus's former neighbors to acknowledge him seemingly limited "his power to make manifest the kingdom of God through deeds of power." Lose goes on to wonder "if Mark is simply inviting us to contemplate the possibility that we actually have something to do, that we have an important role to playing the manifestation the kingdom. To say it another way: this isn't about salvation, it's about the role each one of us is invited to play in sensing, experiencing and making known God's will and work in the world."

If you look at the cover of today's service bulletin, you see a present, a gift. Is it still a gift if it is refused by the person to whom it is given? Mark, in his gospel, may be pointing out to us our role as recipients of God's gift of the Kingdom. David Lose suggests that we might "consider in what ways we are encouraging or inhibiting God's work in our lives, communities, households, and the world. Similarly, is there some opportunity God might be inviting us to, or some challenge God may be setting for us that we find difficult to embrace or entertain?"

As part of the Kingdom, THIS is Jesus's hometown. As believers, WE are Jesus's kin. Certainly, this IS Jesus's house. Maybe we do need to consider how we are honoring OUR prophet in his hometown, among his kin and in his own house.