

## “So Close And Yet So Far Away”

Mark 6:1-13

*“Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”*

Today's message is about relationship. It is a reminder to us that even as devout Christians, we must be mindful of and reevaluate the unique relationship that we have with our Maker. Today's message is about our every day relationship with God.

So, in the first part of today's Gospel lesson we hear about Jesus' coming home. We hear about Jesus bringing His ministry back to its roots, to His hometown. Jesus' ministry up to this point had been in the areas surrounding His hometown of Nazareth, but in today's Gospel the Messiah comes home. However, as we heard, Jesus the person was perhaps welcomed back home, but Jesus the Messiah did not receive the welcome that He had encountered in other towns. Upon His arrival, Jesus did what He always does and began to teach.

While the crowds were astounded and amazed by His wise teachings and miraculous acts, the ultimate result was negative instead of positive. You see for the Nazarene's, Jesus was not the Messiah. He couldn't be. For one thing, Jesus did not come back to Nazareth as a great war hero, which is what most Jews of the day expected of the coming Messiah. More importantly, however, Jesus couldn't be the Messiah for the Nazarene's because He was simply a local boy. Jesus was just the son of Mary and Joseph. That's when, Jesus, reacting to this unenthusiastic reception, makes the statement that is pretty much the main point of this part of our Gospel lesson today. Jesus wisely quoted an old proverb to his fellow Nazarene's saying, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”

Now, what I found strange about today's Gospel is that the story just ends there. I mean, the Gospel reading goes on, but it just goes on to another story or section. For the first part of today's Gospel though, that's it. Jesus' words did not change the hearts of His people. Nothing happened. The Gospel says that Jesus did very little in Nazareth at that

time, and the story ends. Jesus quotes this proverb and that's that. So, I found myself asking, well what are we supposed to get out of that story? Perhaps simply the message that familiarity breeds contempt?

As I was preparing for today's sermon, I began to think on this more and more, and eventually I came up with a couple of thoughts. First, I realized that this small story in today's Gospel was kind of the culminating event in a reoccurring theme throughout Mark. It was the end piece to something that is seen throughout the Gospel according to Mark. We often hear preachers refer to the disciples in Mark as dumb, and this is true in a sense. The disciples throughout the entire Gospel according to Mark just don't get it. They never really are able to understand who Jesus is.

However, this is part of the point that the author of Mark is trying to make and part of the point that is ended with Jesus' quotation of that proverb we read in today's Gospel. In Mark, the people closest to Jesus are not the one's who really understand who Jesus is. The one's who get it in Mark, the one's who truly believe are the outsiders, the unlikely, the people on the fringes of society and even on the fringes of Jesus' followers. Those in Mark who recognize Jesus as God are not His family, the people of His hometown, and certainly not His disciples. They are the prostitute, the leper, the unclean who were told by Jesus that it was their faith that had healed them. In Mark, these are the people who truly understood who and what Jesus was.

So we can begin to see how today's Gospel fits into the ongoing theme throughout Mark, but the question remains. What is the point of that theme or Jesus' message in today's Gospel? To be honest, I can't really say that I found the right or true answer to that question. However, in thinking on today's Gospel I do think that there is something important that we can all take with us today from this text. Today's Gospel reminds us to be mindful of and reevaluate our relationship with God. You see the theme that was carried on throughout Mark is not very different from situations that we all experience in our own lives.

For us too, more often than not, the people closest to us unintentionally get the worst of us. Many times the ones we love and those whom we live with are taken for granted because they are always with us, and often times they can end up being treated worse than we would ever treat any of our co-workers, friends, or even acquaintances. Many times, someone in our family tries to teach us a lesson or get us to see a point and their words fall on deaf ears, and then when a friend or acquaintance tries to make the exact same point we receive it warmly and hear it automatically. It seems to me that perhaps we can identify

with what Jesus is saying in today's Gospel much more than we thought. We often treat our family members and our most dear loved ones in the same fashion that Jesus was treated by His family, friends, and neighbors when he returned to Nazareth.

If this is true, if those who are the closest to us actually end up getting the least of us, then I can't help but to wonder if this relationship dynamic carries over into our relationships with God. Personally, I often identify myself with the "dumb" disciples in Mark, but I wonder now if that comparison goes deeper than I have ever thought. Are we like the disciples of Jesus in that we are too close to God to hear or recognize God as well? In our relationship with God does God end up being treated unintentionally like one of our family members, disrespected, not heard, not paid attention to? Scripture says that the body is God's dwelling place, God's temple or home, and in the Eucharist we take Christ into to our bodies in the belief that He indeed dwells therein. I find myself wondering though as to what that relationship or living arrangement looks like from God's perspective. Do we invite God in, invite God to come home and then do all we can to cultivate such an important relationship? Or do we end up welcoming God as the Nazarene's welcomed Jesus?

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, the message that I got from today's Gospel and the message that I want us all to take with us today is a simple reminder. It is a reminder of our human tendency to treat poorly and take for granted those who are closest to us, and a reminder to constantly reevaluate and take seriously the closest relationship that we all have, our relationship with God.

*“Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”*

*Amen.*