

Pentecost 6 (Proper 9)

July 8, 2012

Text: Mark 6: 1-13

Theme: "Jesus' Family Drama"

I get the Gospel according to Mark this Sunday because I am a pastor and I know how I am viewed by my earthly family and college friends. Jesus had come back to his hometown and there was so little faith present that he did no mighty works. It is not that he is dependent upon our faith to do miracles. He is God after all. He can do whatever he likes whenever he likes but what's the point of doing miracles when there is no faith present? Miracles never convert anyone. That's one of the lessons we learn with age as our wisdom grows. There is a time when we believe that if we do something spectacular, everyone will believe in us. If we work hard and do everything the boss asks, we will be promoted and the company will love us forever. Then we get downsized, or a new board of directors doesn't particularly like us, or times change and our amazing skills become obsolete. Suddenly the golden boy is searching the want ads.

It's the same way with miracles. People either believe or they don't. If they have faith, miracles are confirmation of faith and they strengthen faith. If they do not have faith, miracles are just cool tricks to be figured out and doubted. If you reject Jesus, that is your

choice and God will not try to trick you into belief with parlor games nor force you to believe by his might. A pastor may be viewed as “the man of God” by his flock but to his brothers and sisters, he’s just that kid who grew up alongside you. All of us are familiar with the drama that goes on in families. There is jealousy and envy. There are presuppositions and assumptions and many people spend most of their time at a family reunion trying not to get cornered by people with whom they don’t get along.

In the face of this reality, Jesus did not do anything big in his hometown. There was no point in the face of such unbelief. There were a few sick people, who had faith, and he took care of them but in the end, he sent out his disciples. He gave them the authority they needed and charged them to expect the people of God to take care of all their needs. They had to focus only on their mission – to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to people who were weighed down by burdens of guilt and shame. It was like being the guy who got to travel through the South in the 1860’s and proclaim the Emancipation Proclamation to black people. Whether you know it or not, you are free. You may choose to live like a slave and think like a slave, but according to God, you are free and no one else’s opinion matters.

This is still our job today and still our own version of family drama hinders us. Don't let family drama stop you from doing your job. It doesn't matter who thinks you should be doing something else or doing whatever you are doing in a different way. There will always be members of our Christian family who want to hold onto our sin and chain us up with it. Free people irritate them because they are still in the chains of their own making. I know that they have created their own chains because only God has the power to chain you and he is the one who sets you free!

In our mission to proclaim the Gospel, we are faced with doubt and opposition, but remember that it is Jesus whom we serve, not human beings. We only serve people on behalf of Jesus, and if they reject him, they reject us and we move on. We finally answer only to the head of the family, the Lord God himself. But having said that, when we try to proclaim that people have been freed from all sin by the death of Jesus Christ, perhaps part of the reason we get rejected is our own fault. We tend to trust what people tell us if we trust that person and if we don't trust that person, we may never believe anything he has to say. We are not looking for big miracles, just basic trust that the person who is speaking to us loves us and wants to help us. But sometimes we let the family drama get in our way. People stop worshipping because someone said something

mean or they were not properly thanked or the pastor seemed not to be very attentive to their needs. Then we hear phrases like,

“I’ll never go back to that church. They’re just a bunch of hypocrites!” Drama, drama, drama followed by excuses and yet more drama. Last week at the convention I attended, a man spoke who had been a very marginalized believer and now he was a pastor in the LCMS. What are the secret words that turned that man’s life around? What was the miracle that was worked to convince him to actively worship Jesus and lead others to do the same? Was he healed from a horrible disease? Was his life in the toilet only to be rescued by a powerful Christian?

Nope. What happened was a professor at the Graduate school he was attending talked to him. At a casual gathering, they were talking about school and things around campus and the professor looked at him and asked,

“How are you doing spiritually?” When his answer was that he was pretty stagnant spiritually and felt disconnected from God and religion, the professor invited him to church. That was it! No amazing miracles were performed. No precise theological words were spoken. Just a caring person expressed concern over his spiritual life and invited him to church. There’s not enough

information there to fill a two-page Evangelism flyer. But that is how simple evangelism is.

First, take attendance. Who is not here? Who do you know who would benefit from being here? Start with the church directory and then broaden out to the white pages.

Second, find those people who you know and say, “How are you doing spiritually?” And listen to their answer. They might say they are doing great, at St. Alexander’s or Harvard Bible Church. GREAT! Wish them well and let me know so we can clean up the paperwork. They might tell you why they are not doing so well spiritually. They are not asking you to fix it. You can’t fix it anyway. Just listen. Then...

Third, invite them here because here is where it can be fixed – no matter what it is, it can be fixed here. Here is where God’s Word is read and proclaimed and we know that his Word has power in and of itself. Here is where we are reminded of the Baptismal waters that flow over our heads night and day washing away all sin. Here is where we receive the body and blood of Christ to strengthen our faith so that we can truly believe that we are forgiven and freed. This is the hospital. Bring the sick people to the hospital!

I loved the television show House partially because I completely resonate with the lead character and partially because

the role of pastor is a great deal like a doctor in a hospital. I am not the healer. I am the diagnostician. My goal is to diagnose your particular problem so that I can better apply the healing Gospel to your life. Like Greg House, sometimes I am dead on and sometimes I completely miss the mark but I struggle on to deliver the medicine to you to keep you strong and to heal all the sick you bring me.

Sometimes we get sidetracked with family drama. Jesus had it too. It's part of living in and with humanity. But press onward, as Jesus did and remember that what really matters is delivering the Gospel to a sick and dying world.