

Sermon 2009 Pentecost 5
7-05-09
Text: Mark 6:1-13
Theme: "Known Chiefly in Mercy"

The best offence is a good...? Defense right? We like to hope for the best but prepare for the worst. We get all of our ducks in a row, sandbags at the ready for whatever flood we fear we may be facing and that is when we find ourselves surprised by grace.

Confrontation is our nature. Our sinful human nature makes us confrontational people. And those of us who think we are not confrontational, let me introduce you to concept called passive aggression. EVERYONE is confrontational. Some come right out and confront whatever it is they don't like. Some wiggle around the whole face to face issue but still manage to derail the plan by either ignoring the part they were to play or by sabotaging the plan secretly.

Most of us, however, are only confrontational in the issues about which we know that we are right. We like to be on the winning side and we don't want to make our stand, either actively

or passively, only to find out that we were wrong, how embarrassing.

So we set up battle plans that would put Patton to shame, making sure that all the areas of where we know that we are right are set as our assault arsenal and all the areas where we think we could be wrong are well hidden. And then one day WE ARE CONFRONTED with the truth.

God does not work that way. The way of confrontation and winning and losing and being right are totally alien to God. God works through all things and all people – good and bad, strong and weak, right and wrong but he works for one purpose – to show us his love and mercy. In fact, it is harder to find where God does NOT work than where he does work. He works through everything around us and that means being the most right does not matter any more than being the most wrong. Being the strongest does not matter any more than being the weakest. It seems as though the only time God is not working is when no one wants any grace.

Look at Ezekiel. God says, "Stand on your feet and I will speak to you!" That has to be pretty scary when the creator tells you to stand up and he's going to speak to you! But before Ezekiel could even get his argument in order, God's spirit entered him and set him on his feet. That is amazing! God calls us to do something and then sends his spirit to empower us to do it. It doesn't matter how strong or weak, right or wrong Ezekiel was. God called and the spirit entered and there you have it.

Look at St. Paul. He had a thorn in the flesh. What was it? We don't know but he begged the Lord to be rid of it. Some think it was his eyesight – that he was blind or almost so. Can you imagine trying to do the work he did, write the letters he wrote, travel the miles he traveled before handicapped accessible everything, being blind? But God says, "Don't worry about it. My grace is sufficient. In fact, it is when you are weak that my grace shines the brightest."

But look at Jesus. Jesus could do no mighty works. Why? The people didn't want God's grace. They were more interested in arguing than receiving. They were more concerned about

whether Jesus was worthy to teach them than receiving his gifts of love and forgiveness. Who is he to offer them forgiveness?

Isn't he just the son of that carpenter Joseph?

What do you want from God today? Did you come here because you're afraid God might punish you somehow if you don't show up at least occasionally? God doesn't punish us for refusing gifts. If you don't want grace, love and forgiveness, that might sadden him but it doesn't make him angry.

Did you come here because you need or want something? Maybe you want to be healed like St. Paul. Maybe you need strength to walk the path you are on like Ezekiel. Maybe you need a job, or money or maybe you just want an easier life. Well God may grant those gifts to you today, or he might have something better in mind for you. He might send his Spirit into you to stand you up on your feet in a way of which you had not thought.

The important point is not why you came here today but that you did and you came wanting something from God. And now that you are here, you are inviting God's grace to rain down

upon you. You are inviting the pure, unbridled power of the creator of the universe to pour into you and do whatever it does. He might challenge you. He might comfort you. He might give you exactly what you are asking for...but I doubt it because whatever you are asking for, it is probably too small and too insignificant. Whatever he does for you today as you receive his powerful Word and eat and drink his body and blood, I know that you will grow and so will continue the slow deliberate drowning of your old sinful flesh and the raising up of the new person that you are in Christ Jesus – and tomorrow – you will shine brighter than you did yesterday. AMEN.