

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to July 6

Proper 9

Year B

RCL



Ezekiel 2:1-5

Psalms 123

Mark 6:1-13

The Collect

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Ezekiel 2:1-5

The Lord said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD.” Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

Psalm 123 Page 780, BCP

Ad te levavi oculos meos

- 1 To you I lift up my eyes,
to you enthroned in the heavens.
- 2 As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters,
and the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
- 3 So our eyes look to the LORD our God,
until he show us his mercy.
- 4 Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy,
for we have had more than enough of contempt,
- 5 Too much of the scorn of the indolent rich,
and of the derision of the proud.

Mark 6:1-13

Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.

And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

SERMON

“Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

Just who do you think you are, Jesus? It's nice that you're interested in religion, but you're a carpenter and some of the things you are doing and saying just aren't right. What are you playing at?

The offense taken at Jesus and his inability to do deeds of power in his home town illuminates the paradox of faith. Unless people recognize that God is present, speaking, and acting in Jesus, no form of testimony will persuade them to

follow Him. No amount of explanation or evidence can provide that initial evidence of faith. We may exhort, persuade, offer support, and more, but in the end faith remains a mysterious gift of responding to God's Word. It cannot be constructed. It can only be received. Unfortunately and very often, the clutter in our minds about God and Jesus blocks the gift of faith.

We've become, if you'll forgive me for saying so, too comfortable in our understanding of Jesus, and the peril of becoming too comfortable in our understanding of Jesus is being played out for us in our passage from Mark. The people of his home town knew Jesus as the carpenter. They viewed Jesus through the lens of their certainties about who he was. Because they were incom-

plete, flawed people, as are we, their certainties about Jesus were flawed and incomplete, and those certainties completely obscured the real Jesus, leading Him to say:

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

You and I read Mark's account through the lens of what has been taught to us about Jesus since we were children. Like the people in Nazareth, we think we know who Jesus is and because we are so certain of our knowledge, we no longer see the real Jesus - we see only our image of Jesus. We are so certain of this image of Jesus that we pass it on to our children. Vivanie is collecting books about Jesus. They are like the books about Jesus you probably gave your children and grand-

children, books about the smiling brown haired Jesus who did nice things for people, and cured them of their illnesses. Is that the real Jesus? The question for each of us is this: would those people in Nazareth have been offended by the image of Jesus you carry in your head or the Jesus of children's books? Would the gentle Jesus of 21st Century American churches have ruffled any feathers at all in Palestine? I'd like to suggest that he would not. Such a domesticated Jesus could do no deeds of power in his home town and I'd suggest that such a domesticated Jesus can do no deeds of power in our time, either, though we need a deed of power now more than ever.

One of the books in my library is titled "Jesus Was Not a Nice Guy". That's shocking but it

names the problem. The author notes:

If Jesus were merely loving, compassionate, kind - if Jesus were only a nice guy - why did both the Jews and the Romans feel compelled to murder Him? If we fail to look at the darker sides of Jesus, then we're not getting the whole picture.¹

The villagers who were offended by Jesus in his home town were the decent, middle class workaday people of the town, the ones who looked after their marriages and were scrupulous about the demands of their religion - the salt of the earth, you might say. Jesus was of that class, but Jesus was saying things to them that they could not bear to hear. He was not being a nice guy. He was confronting everything they had learned and assumed from birth on. Just like many in our own

¹ Jesus Was Not a Nice Guy, by Rev. Kory Wilcoxson

time, the villagers saw their commitment to their religion as external - something one did. Jesus was telling them that the love of God is internal - something one lives. Fr. Richard Rohr puts it this way:

In my experience there is an almost complete correlation between the degree of emphasis one puts on obligations, moralities, [and] ritual performance and one's lack of any real inner experience.²

The more you busy yourself with obligations, moralities and ritual performance, the less capable you become of perceiving the movement of God within you. Those are harsh words to hear, particularly at our point in history when recent events press so many of our buttons. We want to please God. We have been taught that one pleas-

² From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality by Richard Rohr, Joseph Martos

es God by following His commandments, so we want to advocate for the sorts of behavior God has approved, but is this not a great heresy? Are we not trying to control God? God doesn't love us because He HAS to if we do certain things. He loves us because He WANTS to. God does not love us because we are good. God loves us because God is good.

Because being a Christian in America to-day doesn't automatically come with costs, we may lose sight of the radical, countercultural statement we make each time we enter the doors of a church.

There are some things that Jesus says that are really meaningful, that deserve to be memorized and repeated and posted on Facebook when a friend is having a bad day. "Love thy neighbor." "Come to me, all you who are weary." "I am

the light of the world.” Those are all touching, moving statements. But have you ever seen a wall hanging or crocheted pillow that says, “You faithless generation!” It’s funny how there are certain things Jesus said and did that we conveniently forget because they don’t fit our image of who Jesus is. It’s easy to ignore the harsher stuff when we can sing “What A Friend We Have in Jesus” and hear stories about Him welcoming the little children. That’s the good Jesus. We want the good Jesus.

But there’s a problem with that Jesus. Catholic writer Andrew Greeley says it this way: “Once you domesticate Jesus, he isn’t there anymore. The domestic Jesus may be an interesting fellow, a good friend, a loyal companion, a helpful business associate, a guarantor of the justice of your wars. But one thing he is certainly not: the Jesus of the New Testament.”³

We opened our time together with this prayer. Listen again to the words.

³ Jesus Was Not a Nice Guy, by Rev. Kory Wilcoxson

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

“O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor.” During his time on earth, Jesus spurned the comfortable, certain people and spent his time with sinners. He taught his disciples, and us if we will attend to Him, that the commandments lead us to living in love - love of God and love of neighbor. If that underlying foundation of love is not present, no amount of care with the commandments will substitute for it. It is devilishly easy to

become self-righteous over gay marriage, for instance. Even the Pharisees could manage that, but Jesus taught us

How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

In Mark's time, the Pharisees were the group who honored all 613 commandments scrupulously. Jesus had nothing good to say about them. They, in turn, murdered Him. In Father Rohr's words, "...there is an almost complete correlation between the degree of emphasis one puts on obligations, moralities, and ritual performance and one's lack of any real inner experience."

Choose your sides carefully, church.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

“When you ask God into your life, you think God is going to come into your psychic house, look around, and see that you just need a new floor or better furniture, and that everything needs just a little cleaning - and so you go along thinking how nice life is that God is there. Then you look out the window one day and you see that there’s a wrecking ball outside. It turns out your foundation is shot and that you’re going to have to start building it from scratch.”

As a preacher, I love that quote. As a Christian, I hate it because of what it means. It means that if I truly want to open my life to Jesus, if I truly want to experience the joy and the new life the resurrection will bring, I have to be willing to do

more than let Jesus rearrange a few chairs. I
have to let Him set fire to things.⁴

⁴ Wilcoxson, Rev. Kory (2014-11-09). Jesus Was Not a Nice Guy. BookBaby. Kindle Edition.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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