

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

Psalm 48

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Mark 6:1-13

Most of us have had the experience of growing up and leaving home or we are looking forward to doing that in the near future. Things change for us when we leave home. We spread our wings. We try new things. We learn how to support ourselves and we may learn some new skills in order to do that. But almost all of us will have experienced that very odd phenomenon of returning to our family home only to discover that within a few hours, we are once again behaving and feeling like the adolescents we were before we left home. We seem to go back in time whether we want to or not! And if we are completely successful at maintaining our new adult selves when we get home, we may get met with comments that sound a lot like, “ Well who do you think you are?” We aren’t fitting into the old roles we had in the family and everyone else is a little bewildered about how to deal with us. We seem to have gotten just a bit too big for our britches.

The same phenomenon happens to Jesus when he returns to Nazareth for the first time after his baptism and the beginning of his ministry. Not only does he return to his hometown, but he shows up with his twelve disciples in tow! He has made a name for himself already in the area around Galilee and word gets back to the hometown folks who don’t quite know what to do about Jesus’ newfound fame. Isn’t this the little boy we watched grow up here? I remember him. Didn’t he become a carpenter? Isn’t that Mary’s son? What are all these stories we’re hearing about him? And who are all these people with him? When did he get so important that he’s now travelling with an entourage?

They listen to him preach in the synagogue and they are amazed. As skeptical as they might be, they are also amazed and astonished by his presence and the air of authority that surrounds him. It doesn’t take long for the discrepancy between what they remember about the boy Jesus and the experience they are now having with the grown-up Jesus to become too big to manage. Jesus isn’t behaving like he used to. This is not the Jesus they know and remember. He seems to have gotten too big for his britches. Who does he think he is? Awe turns to irritation and annoyance and a bit of anger.

Who is he indeed? That’s what the entire gospel of Mark is devoted to...all the gospels as a matter of fact. They are about the identification and the revelation of who Jesus really is. It is sometimes hard to believe...even for the most trusting and gullible of us.

The hometown reaction to Jesus is one of rejection. He won't fit back into the mold of the Jesus they remember and they get angry. They don't know how to deal with this grown-up Jesus...this one who speaks with authority....this one can perform miracles and heal people and cast out demons. The little boy Jesus they all remember couldn't do any of those things. Even the young carpenter couldn't do them. And he's shown up with an entourage. Who in the world does he think he is?

We've all had that experience...the one of being rejected. The experience of not meeting someone else's expectations of who or what we should be. It's an uncomfortable feeling and one that most of us try to avoid if at all possible. It's particularly painful when it happens in our families where we still want very much to feel like we belong...even if we and also the other members of our family...aren't quite the same as we used to be. In his own hometown, Jesus' power is curtailed because of the unbelief and rejection of those around him. They simply don't believe that he's any different than when they knew him growing up...and they won't let him be his grown-up self, so he goes out to the nearby villages to teach.

Jesus understands how painful and lonely rejection can feel. He's certainly experienced it himself and sometimes from people that he loves very much. But despite the fact that he knows his disciples will face rejection out in the world, he sends them out in pairs to tell others the good news. He gives them the authority over unclean spirits and the power to heal. He gave them very strict instructions about how to travel and what to do as they went. They were to go out in pairs; they were to take only a staff and one tunic and sandals. They were to take no money and no bread and no change of clothing. This is an exercise in trust...trust in God that their needs would be met and trust in the people they met along the way...that these people would serve God by taking care of them.

Jesus also told them what to do if they were rejected...what to do if people did not welcome them...what to do if people refused to listen to them. Jesus told them not to belabor the point. He told them to shake it off...literally...to shake the dust off their feet as testimony to those who had rejected them. It was reminiscent of an old Jewish custom of shaking the dust off the feet when they reached Israel after walking through gentile territory. Just shake it off.

There are several important points in all of these instructions. Jesus commanded that they trust God to take care of their physical needs. That's a hard thing to do as all of us with a bank account know. It feels very scary and imprudent, even, to trust that God will take care of our physical needs. Most of us plan ahead. We work hard. We save. We are prudent with our

assets. We don't expect others or even God to take care of us...and, yet, Jesus is encouraging us to do just that.

And Jesus is also reminding us not to let the sting of rejection penetrate us or stay with us. He says, literally, "Shake it off!" Being rejected for who you are need not be a permanent injury. Sometimes the harshest criticism we get is from ourselves. We need to be aware of that as well. We aren't always so forgiving of our own mistakes and yet that's a part of learning and growing. Even then, Jesus tells us to 'shake it off' ...shake off the harsh words we have for ourselves.

Like us, the disciples have been commissioned. They've been sent out into the world to tell everyone they meet about Jesus and about God's love for them. Being rejected for telling people about your experience with God and your hope in your faith is part of what's to be expected when we tell people about God. Not everyone is going to want to hear about it.

Notice, if you will, that in all these instructions, Jesus is telling us to share our faith with others, but don't belabor it. Don't insist that someone listen to you. "Shake it off" if they won't listen to you. When Jesus sends us out into the world to share our faith...to share the good news about God and about him, he expects that we will meet with rejection. It goes with the territory. And with all those instructions that he gave us about going out into the world, not once did he say to the disciples or to us..."Be sure they take in everything you say!"

How the good news is received is *not* our responsibility. Our responsibility is to deliver the good news...to share what we know...to share what we've experienced. It's not our job...and never has been...to make sure that someone else buys into what we are saying about God or about Jesus. How it's received is up to the person we are talking to...not us!

We've been commissioned to share the good news. We may get met with responses that resemble the comment, "Who do you think you are?" ...telling me what to believe. But Jesus tells us that once we've shared the good news and demonstrated the good news we've done our part. But our words and our actions have to match if we are to have any hope that anyone else will believe us. That's crucial.

But whether or not they do...is out of our hands!

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.