

Encounter at Nazareth Mark 6: 1-13

July 8, 2012

preached by Andrew Eddy at St. John's Church in Thomaston

Good morning! Right after I signed up to preach I thought – Andrew - what have you done?! A few days later I received the readings for today. I had to chuckle when I read the Gospel – Jesus returning to his home town to preach! There was – I'm guessing - one major difference – when Jesus got up to speak in front of all the people who had known him – he probably wasn't quite as - nervous - as I am. + + + As I read the first half of the today's Gospel – I have to tell you - there is a part of me that went right to the mind, in a little fantasy, of one of the fellows who confronted him in the Synagogue in Nazareth. I imagined, this now bitter man, remembering Jesus when they were both kids – hearing his mother – on more than one occasion – saying– “Andrew - Andrew - Andrew – why can't you be more like Jesus ? . . . You know very well who I'm talking about. Mary's son?. He's such a good boy!” Would I hold a grudge - be a little jealous? Perhaps . . . From what we know, Jesus was a good kid – and certainly an intelligent one. We're told: As Jesus grew up he advanced in wisdom and in favor with God and men. That's great and good . . . but . . . He was also one of us – human. For some reason I've never really thought of Jesus as having been one of those 'squeaky clean' - obnoxiously perfect kids. For me – I'm thinking that he probably got himself into one fix after another as a kid – lost a mantle – ripped his tunic and got it dirty just before going to the synagogue. And don't we all remember what happened when he was twelve – the time when he and his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival . . . Let me remind you . . . this is a good one! When the festive season was over and they started for home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know of this; but thinking that he was with the party they journeyed on for a whole day, and only then did they begin looking for him among their friends and relations. As they could not find him they returned to Jerusalem to look for him; and after three days they found him sitting in the temple surrounded by the teachers . . . enough said. He was - I'm sure - a good kid . . . doing what kids do! And as a teenager - - - can you imagine what he must have been like to live with?! Now . . . Imagine . . . all the mental & emotional & spiritual changes that Jesus had to have gone through as a devout young Jewish man - in order for him to be willing - and - able - to step forward into His

destiny . . . into his divinity. + Why on earth would Jesus choose to go back to Nazareth – his home town – knowing that there was a pretty good chance that the reception he was going to get was going to be pretty dicey? He must have known that his reputation was going to precede him. Jesus wasn't just another great 'teacher' on the lecture circuit – His words – his actions – they were radical – they were dangerous – and they were scary! His powerful message of repentance and the many miracles he was performing as he moved from village to village were wondrous to the throngs of people who gathered around him – and worrisome to the powers that be. We saw in the gospel several weeks ago how His own family out of fear or embarrassment – or both - “went out (to the hill-country where he was staying) to restrain him” because “the scribes who had come down from Jerusalem” to check him out were saying he was possessed by the “prince of devils.” How surprised – and perhaps upset and even shocked - they must have been to see their Jesus talking back to the learned scribes of Jerusalem – speaking to them with parables! He was pushing a lot of peoples buttons – So – why did he go back to Nazareth? It was necessary - even critical that he go. What he knew he would encounter at Nazareth would become a crash course, if you will, for his disciples on how they were to face their future as his followers - a future that would confront them with all the jealousy, hate and fear that the world could and would throw at them. I can imagine – Jesus and his disciples - they've been walking all day toward Nazareth - they're hot, tired, dirty, hungry - and maybe even a little cranky. Turning to his disciples at the edge of town he says, “Listen up! Pay attention! And, yes, there will be a test! “ 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! And then the fateful moment came – the crowds astonishment awakened their jealousy – their envy and their fear. 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. And what are the people offended by? They are offended by the gifts he has, the wisdom he has and the healing power he displays. They are offended by his authority. In their minds - Jesus is no longer 'one of them'. + Jesus then transforms this awkward rejection into a teaching moment for his disciples – and for us. How did he react? He faced the derision and hatred and jealousy straight on. He said to the congregation - and to his disciples who were with him: Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house. He called the situation for what it was. He showed his disciples what they

were up against. Teaching moment two: Jesus and his disciples stayed in Nazareth - even though the lack of faith among the people meant that he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. Sadly - not even those acts of compassion among their own people could change the hearts of those who had taken offense at him. And he was amazed at their unbelief. + Jesus had shown his disciples how to face fear and find the faithful. Then he went about among the villages teaching. Test time! He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two (apostolos means 'sent' in Greek), and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. Jesus was getting them used to the power and responsibility that they would hold in the future. After carefully instructing them on the details for their first mission he sent them on their way. They were on the 'the radical simplicity prayer plan' - guaranteed to foster faith and humility among them through their total reliance on God for their direction and protection. They were available - and they were vulnerable. This would be their first great undertaking of faith. 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. + We are on our own great undertaking of faith. We long for spiritual perfection - we live - by God's grace - with spiritual progress . The Last Word Come to the edge, he said. They said, We are afraid. Come to the edge, he said. They came. He pushed them . . . And they flew. Peter McWilliams