

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 6:1-13

¹ He 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! ³ 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. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ 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." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Late one Christmas Day, a man from the high-class community of Hillsborough, California, accompanied by his wife and children, set out to sing carols for the neighbors. As they were tuning up outside their first stop, the woman of the house came to the door, looking distraught. "Look fella, she said, I'm just too busy. The plumbing is on the blink, I can't get anybody to fix it, and there's a mob coming for dinner. If you really feel like singing carols, come back about nine o'clock, okay?" "Yes, ma'am", replied Bing Crosby respectfully, as he herded his troupe elsewhere.

Wow! What a missed opportunity for the woman of the house. Little did she know that she was turning away the voice of a famous crooner, a famous singer with an amazing voice that just about anyone would have died to have had shown up at their door to sing. Can you imagine rejecting Bing Crosby and the opportunity to be his private audience? With what you know about Jesus, can you imagine anyone rejecting him? And yet, he was. We read here that he in fact was rejected by the people in his own hometown.

Today's scripture takes place shortly after Jesus called his disciples. This story is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke also, however, with some differences. Only Mark and Luke include the detail that Jesus' teaching in the synagogue occurred on the Sabbath. Only Luke locates Jesus' teaching in his hometown of Nazareth, and only Luke cites Isaiah 61 as the passage not only from which Jesus read, but also applied to himself.

In Mark and Matthew, the crowd identifies Jesus as the local carpenter and lists the names of his parents, Mark mentioning only Mary, as well as his siblings. The crowd in Luke identifies him only as Joseph's son. While Luke is the only gospel in which Jesus quotes the proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself" (4:23), all of the synoptics attribute to Jesus the saying about a prophet not being welcome in his own country and among his own kin.

Another difference pertains to Jesus' ability to perform miracles. While Matthew states that Jesus could not do many mighty works in that place because of the people's unbelief, Mark says he couldn't do any mighty works there, except that he healed a few sick people through the

laying on of hands. Apparently, healing the sick was not a particularly spectacular miracle for Jesus, according to Mark.

This is a story of rejection that these Gospel writers considered significant to pass along to us. Let's move on now to uncover the lessons Mark wants us to learn from Jesus' example.

While Jesus was in town he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach. The scripture tells us that the town's people were amazed by his teaching. We might conclude that if they were amazed they were pleased with what he was saying. And maybe they were, but there was apparently something that bothered them.

The scripture tells us that the town's people talked among themselves about their memories of who he was and what he did. They remembered him as the carpenter's son, who learned his father's trade and served the community also with this trade.

The Greek word for carpenter used here is "tekton". "Tekton" does mean a worker in wood, but it means more than merely a woodworker or cabinet maker. It means working as a craftsman. A craftsman would build you anything from a chicken-coop to a house. He was the kind of man who could build a wall, mend a roof, repair a gate. The craftsman was a handy-man, who with few or no instruments and the simplest of tools could do any job. This is what Jesus did. This is how the hometown crowd knew him.

This is exactly why the people did not appreciate Jesus. He was a common working-man, a layman, and here he was teaching them as a much-respected Rabbi. The people of Nazareth despised him because he was a common working man.

Today, we view Jesus' simple life and his humanity as a reason to respect and honor him. We know him as Immanuel, God with Us. He took upon himself the common life with all its common tasks. He did not exempt himself from the hardships of everyday life. But that is not how the people of Nazareth viewed him. They instead wondered something like, "what right, what authority does this simple man Jesus have to teach us about these Godly matters.

A caution arises for us here to beware of judging a book by its cover, as the saying goes. Our perceptions may be misguided and result in causing us to be close-minded towards a person and what that person has to offer us. This is not the first time the scriptures give us this warning, but it is a difficult lesson to put into practice sometimes. Likewise, we may find ourselves on the receiving end of false judgement and misguided perceptions resulting in unfair rejection.

We also find in this text that Mark identifies Jesus as, "Mary's son." This indicates, as some theologians presume that Jesus' earthly father, Joseph died at a young age. Mark also names Jesus' younger male siblings; and he mentions that Jesus had sisters. We know that Jesus only began his ministry when he was thirty. Perhaps the reason for this late start could be that he filled his father's shoes by caring for and supporting his mother and his siblings until they were old enough to fend for themselves before he ventured out on his own.

With Jesus living and working in the community for thirty years, the town's people became quite familiar with who he was and what he did. This familiarity with Jesus was likely another reason the people rejected him. Sometimes when familiarity should generate respect it generates an easy-going, relaxed familiarity. Sometimes we grow too close to people that we are unable or unwilling to see their greatness; or accept and changes that may take place in a person's life. You know the saying, the more things, or in this case a person, change; the more people seem to be unwilling to accept the change.

The rejection of Jesus in Nazareth was very personal. Like Jesus, all of us have experienced some kind of rejection, and if you haven't, you are very fortunate, at least for now.

None of us likes being rejected. Rejection doesn't feel good, especially when we are rejected by family members and friends.

But even as Jesus' rejection was personal, the people also rejected the message he had to bring to them, both in word and through acts of "power," which is what the scripture tells us. Unfortunately, he was only able to heal a few of the sick; otherwise, his hands were tied. Where there is no openness, no willingness to hear the word of God or to receive acts of the love of God, there is no possibility of giving them.

Therefore, what we find in this story is that the rejection of Jesus made it impossible for the people of Nazareth to receive all that God had to offer them through him. Likewise, when we are rejected, it is not only our person that is rejected, but also what we have to offer others that gets rejected. What are we to do with this rejection? How are we to respond to it?

I have experienced rejection. I was never popular in school. I never fit in with the people who were popular, even though I tried. I experienced hurtful rejection from members of my Amish family, leaving me with an emptiness because I know that I have a larger family out there somewhere that I will never have the opportunity to know.

Perhaps, the most hurtful rejection that I experienced was inflicted when I, a woman, interviewed for senior pastoral positions in several congregations and was rejected because I am a woman. One congregation was bold enough to send me a letter stating clearly that this was the reason for their unwillingness to interview me. I, also, was told that I was too expensive, without even being given the opportunity to negotiate. I apparently was too old for one congregation, and that was over 10 years ago. All of these reasons were directed towards my personal being.

But at the same time, the gifts and the message, the Good News of a living God in our world, who loves and accepts us, the message that I had to offer those congregations was rejected. I nearly gave up. I accepted the call in a slightly different ministry to serve as a chaplain at Fahrney-Keedy. I questioned myself and what I felt called to do. I asked God about why I was being rejected? Why was what I felt he wanted to do and say through me being rejected? Fortunately, I did not give up.

The disciples watching the rejection of Jesus unfold before their very eyes must have been bewildered. After this happened, Jesus commissioned them to go out in groups of two, and the scripture tells us he gave them authority over unclean spirits. Knowing what they had just witnessed in Nazareth, he sent them with the warning that they, too, would experience rejection.

They were to go with this awareness. They were to go empty-handed and with no expectations because not every place they would venture to and attempt to share the good news with would be ready for what they had to share. Some would reject them even before they said a word. When this happened, they were to shake the dust off their feet and walk away. They were to move on to the next place and the next, never giving up their effort to be and do what God created them to be and do.

Brothers and sisters, how do you respond to rejection? Jesus tells us to be faithful to him and to who God created us to be. We should not allow rejection to reshape us into miserable broken people, nor should we abandon the path we walk daily as we follow Jesus. Jesus tells us to shake-it-off. That's what Jesus did. He didn't stick around in his hometown to try to convince the people to like and accept him. He didn't take their unfavorable words and actions personally. He just left town.

A young salesman became discouraged because he had been rejected by so many customers he approached. He asked a more experienced salesman for some advice.

"Why is it that every time I make a call on someone I get rejected?"

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“I just don’t understand that,” answered the older salesman. “I’ve been hit on the head, called dirty names, and thrown out the door, but I’ve never been rejected.”

Perhaps, rejection isn’t what happens to us but how we interpret what happens to us.

I know what you’re thinking, that’s a way of thinking that is easier said than done. Most of us want everyone to like us. We would sometimes rather try continuously to make people like us. I get that, but that’s not what Jesus said we should do. And, shaking the dust off our feet and walking away sounds so, final, and in a way it is, unless a door opens to us at another point in time.

I believe God feels your pain when you are rejected. Sometimes we are simply living our lives according to God’s will. Sometimes it is as you are making a specific effort to minister to someone through words or deeds. In both cases, not only are you being rejected, but so is God. Remain faithful. Follow the example of Jesus. Pray for and continue to love those who reject you. Who knows, one day things may turn around. Amen.