

Faith-Action

Mark 6:1-13
2 Samuel 5:1-10

New Store/Maysville Presbyterian Churches
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When have you recently felt powerless? Perhaps it was this past year as you tried to deal with the roller coaster effects of a global pandemic and the ongoing attempts to “manage” the disease. Perhaps the feeling of powerlessness came through other circumstances — dealing with a bureaucracy, be it school administrations, the DMV, a bank, an insurance company. In any case, this feeling lingers, leaving one frustrated and at times, a bit angry.

Our New Testament reading this morning is, to me, a bit strange on several fronts. We typically don’t want to consider the human side of Jesus — for some reason it’s far easier and more comfortable to think of Jesus as part of the divine God-head: remote, spiritual, all-knowing, and all powerful. So, to read and hear of a time when Jesus wasn’t all-powerful and all-knowing pushes us out of our comfort zone. Still, the gospel writer Mark relates this account of Jesus, His experience of going back to His hometown, His notable lack of success there, and what He does in response. And, it’s worth taking a look at how it all relates to us here.

As you might figure, I’m struck by the humanity of Jesus portrayed throughout *Mark’s* telling of the Gospel. Here He had just come home from traveling the countryside. He’s had a series of successes in teaching and healing. Things are on a roll. And, now we hear of how His hometown isn’t so supportive — in fact, folks there are “infuriated” with His chutzpa, scandalized that this “son of Mary” would presume the role of a prophet and a healer.

I know that some of you have come back home after living away from Buckingham County — it may have been a short time while at school, it may have been longer. I won’t try to speak for those who have come home, but I can say that if you’re like me who returned home after college and living in Europe for a while, it’s tough sometimes. Part of you remembers how it was — the neighborhood, the friends, even family. You recall the good times, the places that evoke memories of events, family, and friends. And, part of you sees the changes — some good, others not so

much. Things have changed in the places, in the people who have remained, even in you, so that coming home doesn't work as easily or comfortably as you thought it would.

Perhaps that's what happened with Jesus. As I said earlier, *Mark* tells this story, and it's a bit strange. It has close parallels to an event related earlier in the gospel, back in Chapter 3, when Jesus' family seeks to restrain Him, thinking He's gone crazy, out of His head. Here, the folks who watched Him grow up, who knew His brothers, sisters, and mother, go beyond simply wondering what's happened to this carpenter boy and turn their backs on Jesus. That's tough! No two ways about it, that's got to hurt. As *Mark* tells it, Jesus was amazed at their unbelief.

But, the amazing thing to me is not the rejection, not even the seemingly off-hand comment by *Mark* that Jesus could do practically no "powerful deeds" (although it's a typical thing *Mark* inserts from time to time), after all, the writer does point out that Jesus was able to heal a few sick people!

What I find interesting is how Jesus responds to all this. Unlike most humans, He doesn't develop a "righteous" anger; He doesn't call down the fires of heaven to destroy His hometown. Rather, He gathers His disciples and send them out — two by two. Yes, yes, the disciples aren't sent to parts of Jesus' hometown — that much is clear. Instead, they are sent to surrounding villages, not far away; rather, they are commissioned to work nearby with other communities who might be open to hearing the Good News of God's Kingdom.

There's a challenge for us when we think about missions. In the past, we often heard about the great need of foreign missionaries — in the 19th century it was Africa and China, in the early 20th century it was Central and South America. But, in focusing our attention abroad, we sometimes forget that there are folks here in the U.S. who are hurting, who are in need of God's grace and love. What's so encouraging here at New Store and Maysville Presbyterian is that you all are "plugged into" the community so

well. There is, for example, Food Pantry program that provides food to families who don't have enough to eat at home. This work among Buckingham County folk all point to ways that leave us not quite feeling as powerless in the face of hard economic conditions, loss of communal civility, and a general pervasive anxiety in our society today.

Yet, we should to ask ourselves such questions as: Are there places and times when we may be resisting God's activity in our lives? What other ways are we inhibiting (or, better, encouraging) God's work in our lives and in the lives of others?

Jesus sent out the twelve in the face of His own hometown turning away. In *Mark's* telling of the Gospel, there is a developing pattern of rejection-leading-to-new-ministry. Here is a rejection of powerlessness in the face of rejection. Jesus' response can be a model of what we should do. It is what I call "faith-action" — out of our own faith, we are called to action. We are still being sent out to carry the Good News. We are to look at our lives and actions to see how we are sensing, experiencing, and making known God's will and work in the world today.

We are not as powerless as it may seem. Jesus is with us, calling us to go out and share the Good News, to tell of what we have heard, of what we know, of what God has done, is doing, and will do, in, through, and as Jesus the Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: Mighty, ever-present God, You has shown us that all is not lost when things get tough, when we are rejected. Rather, You continue to call us to new ministry, to new ways of sharing Your love and grace and hope through faith. Let our faith move us to action. Let our belief in Your promises strengthen us in times of trouble. Let our lives be Your witnesses even

to those who reject us or make us feel rejected. Be with us in our joys and in our sorrows all the days of our lives. AMEN.