SIXFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Nu‘uanu Congregational Church

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*“No Honor, All Glory”* Mark 6:1-13

**And he was astonished at their unbelief.**

**One of the few lessons Jesus learns in his sojourn upon the earth is the strength and tenacity with which we human beings cling to our assumptions and prejudices. And he learns this valuable lesson—not among unknowing, unfriendly—strangers, but among the very people with whom he had every reason to believe he had a “relationship.” It was among his own family and neighbors that his power and blessing received the least honor.**

**Unfortunately, as his mission and ministry continue, he will encounter more and more people with deeper, more entrenched assumptions and biases. Indeed, these assumptions will become so deep, they will become dangerous, even lethal.**

**In today’s lesson, Jesus returns to his hometown after crisscrossing the Sea of Galilee. He has been preaching and doing amazing acts of healing—of body and spirit—and he has been doing this in both Jewish and in Gentile communities.**

**Last week, as you may remember, the reputation of his power to heal preceded him, so that when he and the disciples came into a Jewish town, one of the leaders of the religious establishment came and humbled himself before Jesus. Indeed, Mark records that Jairus actually “***fell at his feet 23and begged him repeatedly”* [v.22-23] to come and heal his dangerously sick daughter.

Jairus was sort of like a bishop and I know that we do not have bishops here in the United Church of Christ (thank goodness), but try to imagine that we do. For a moment, try to imagine someone who elicits that much “pomp and circumstance,” that much public honor.

Who, I wonder, is the person you imagine? Who is the person you look upon as being so steeped in respect and dignity that you cannot imagine them being anything other than that? Perhaps your seventh grade English teacher, or perhaps the drill sergeant you had in the army— anybody here been in the army? And had a drill sergeant? I have not been in the army but I have had drill sergeants in my life. Anybody had one? You lied; you know everyone has had one of those in their life. Someone you would only know by their position of power and respect.

Now try to imagine *that* person kneeling down in the street, begging for a favor from a very ordinary looking stranger. Try to imagine that respectable person acknowledging a power greater than his or her own—and especially in someone as unassuming as Jesus probably looked to the people of his day.

The scene I have just described is what happened between Jairus and Jesus—and it is, perhaps, only because Jairus did not have old assumptions to draw upon that he was able to have that much trust and respect for who Jesus is, and how much power Jesus is able to wield. It was, perhaps, Jairus’ *un*familiarity with Jesus that allowed him to accept him and believe that he had a power greater than his own.

Certainly, this is what has been happening in earlier chapters here in the Gospel of Mark. In the Galilee preaching tour alone, Jesus has been able to bring healing and wholeness to both Jew and Gentile in every town he and the disciples stopped in—and so:

* **In chapter one, while he was still getting to know Simon and Andrew, Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law, and many, many others who came to Simon’s house;**
* **In chapter two, in Capernaum, the crowds grew so large that one group had to go up on a roof, dig through it in order to get close enough to Jesus, so they could lower their paralyzed friend on his mat so that Jesus might heal him—which, of course, he did;**

## **In the chapter leading up to this one there are many stories of healing, of demons being cast out, of people being restored to wellness and to community with others. In each and every story, the predominant condition for Jesus’ power to be witnessed and realized was that the people he helped were able to receive him for who he was; that they brought to their encounter with him their desire to put away their own assumptions, their own bias, and were willing to meet him as he was.**

## **They were able to ask the question that Gospel of Mark is constantly asking, which is: who do we say Jesus is? What kind of power does he have to change our life, and our assumptions about life? Indeed, Mark demands that we struggle with questions regarding the nature of power *and* life. Are these things what we think they are, or is there more?**

## **For those of us who have preconceived notions, for those who define power in such terms as wealth, domination, control, and earthly recognition, the bad news is that our encounter with Jesus will be limited by those notions.**

## **For those of us who are able to receive him as he is, the good news is that much more is possible—even a real and powerful experience of God is possible; a real and powerful experience of healing and wholeness that transcends the physical and instead brings us into communion with the deepest reality of life which is the eternal and unshakable love of God. This becomes ours. What is more is that it is a *gift* that we need not—because we *cannot*—earn.**

## **God’s love is generous, it is merciful, it is helpful, it is hospitable. For me, the epitome of God’s love is the image of Jesus in last week’s passage when he put his hand out to a little girl saying *“Talitha cum”—little girl, get up.* This is Jesus the Christ who gently and kindly invites us back into life; he is the God who welcomes us into love.**

## **What is unfortunate is that the rejection Jesus encounters here in Nazareth will not be the only place he will be rejected. There will be other places and other people who will be unable to receive him and his message.**

## **Some will be like his neighbors and his own family—they will be unable to overcome their own assumptions about him. Others will feel their own power and position threatened by Jesus’ power.**

## **The Temple officials, the Romans, including Pontius Pilate, will fear their loss of honor and respect. Without these things, their fear of losing control of the people beneath them becomes very possible, and it will lead them to advocate for and undertake Jesus’ crucifixion. What better way to rob Jesus of the power people are beginning to see in him than by the most painful and scandalizing process of execution they had been able to invent?**

## **Still others will simply cling to the status quo of their lives because change is always difficult—even a change for good is difficult and requires courage.**

## **The Gospel of Mark asks us to confront our own assumptions about Jesus and about the power we honor even today. As people of faith, people who profess Jesus as Savior, we are asked to make a decision regarding what kind of power we will embrace and make our reality. What kind of power will we bring into our families and communities? Will it be the power of grace and blessing, or will it be something else?**

## **This was something the first disciples had to grapple with too, and as we all know, at first their responses were not all that encouraging.**

## **Our good news is that they—and we—were given another chance. Indeed, our good news is that even though those first disciples encountered every bit as much hostility and danger as Jesus, they persevered. They continued to bring the message of God’s love to a world that was desperate to hear it and to be lifted-up by it.**

## **In this week’s Gospel lesson, Jesus laments that** *“Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”*[v. 4]

## Our good news is that Jesus’ love for us out-weighed his need for earthly honor, and because of this, even though he did not receive honor in his own time, we give him all honor and glory now.

## We do this by carrying this good news to others through our words and deeds, through our very lives.

## We bring honor and glory to Christ when we strive for more equitable treatment of all people, when compassion and innovation in human interaction becomes our first reaction to new wrinkles in the fabric of our life together; when we are willing to break-through old patterns of behavior, release old biases, and follow Christ and the Spirit into new fields of freedom and caring.

## Two thousand years ago, Jesus was astonished at the unbelief of the people in his hometown of Nazareth. You and I are not because those people are very much like us. What I pray for is that we are able to overcome our old ways, and step out into new life and new ways of loving so that we, and everyone we meet, will know Jesus as the Christ by the way we give him honor and glory. May this be so. Amen.