

July 7, 2024

Mark 6:1-13

Sermon Title: Shake It Off

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² 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.

Nazareth was a small town, an insignificant little village. Five hundred or so people called it home and Jesus was one of them. Living in a small town is both curse and blessing. You can dial the wrong number and talk for twenty minutes anyway. If you try to pull something as a kid, the news gets home to your parents before you do. Part of the beauty of a small town is that everyone knows everyone's business – which is also part of the problem. We see a person on Main Street, and it is so easy to think, "I know you. I know your momma. I know how many times your name has been in the paper. I know how many speeding tickets you've gotten. I know what tavern your dad lives in." It is all right there in the local hometown news. People in small towns know things about each other; the good, the bad, and the ugly; and their memories are long. You can grow up to be compassionate, well-adjusted, successful, and there will be someone in your hometown surprised you amounted to anything.

Nazareth was Jesus' hometown. He grew up there. His family was there. He was a carpenter. He was Mary's son. They knew all about him...

Jesus came home to Nazareth, having just healed the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus' daughter. He had disciples and he had a following. So, he went into his hometown synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach and cured a few folks. Everyone was

amazed and shocked, but not necessarily in a good way. For a moment or two it appears that a warm celebration of “hometown boy makes good” is about to erupt. But it didn’t.

They have a hard time reconciling this Jesus with the one they watched grow up. They know his brothers, and his sisters. Even his family is concerned that he has lost his mind. How is it that this guy has a following? Who does he think he is coming in here and speaking to us like some wise guy – telling us we need to repent.

In Nazareth, Jesus had to contend with the memories of his past. Jesus quoted an old proverb, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” The people of Nazareth were offended by Jesus. We’re not exactly sure what he said that pushed them over the edge, but they couldn’t get past the kid they saw growing up. And now he is calling himself a prophet?

Familiarity breeds contempt, to quote another proverb. The problem with the folks at Nazareth is that they could not reconcile the kid they watched grow up with the authority and position he was claiming. They knew too much and because of that they rejected him and his message of repentance and the Kingdom of God. Now it is Jesus who is amazed. He is amazed at their lack of faith. He was effectively shut down. He was canceled and unfriended. And it was their loss. Jesus had to shake it off. Shake it off...

The very next scene is Jesus preparing his disciples to go off on their own, to cast out demons and heal the sick. In other words, he asks them to do the same thing he is doing. As he sends them, he gives them some very odd instructions. “He orders them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.” They were instructed to rely on the hospitality of those who would receive them. If someone did not receive them, they were instructed to shake it off. Shake the dust from your feet. It is natural to assume that Jesus is talking about getting over rejection, but it is also possible that he is instructing the disciples to not take anything that is not freely given – even dirt.

Either way, they are vulnerable, vulnerable to the pain of rejection and vulnerable to the power of connection. They are challenged to rely on the hospitality of those who will receive them. Ministry, like love, is risky.

Several years ago, NPR did a story on James Comley who found a way to deal with his fear of rejection and turned it into a business. His wife left him for someone taller and richer. Devastated by the rejection he withdrew from life. His **breakdown** was

simultaneously his breakthrough. He realized he had nowhere to go, no one to call, and he just started crying. He realized he was afraid – afraid of rejection.

He decided that the only way he was going to get over his fear of rejection was to be rejected every day. He began in the parking lot of the grocery store. He asked a stranger for a ride across town. When the response was “no,” he was elated. “I got it!” he said to himself, “I got my rejection!” He turned being rejected into a positive.

He did something every day to expose himself to rejection. He made a game of it, literally. He created a deck of cards with all his rejection attempts and began to sell them online with the name “Rejection Therapy.”¹ Do what the card tells you to do and experience possible rejection yourself!

In prepping the disciples, Jesus was basically doing the same thing. “Ask the person in the first house you see to give you some bread.” “Ask the local innkeeper for a free night of lodging.” “Ask a woman at the well to mend your tunic while you are still wearing it.” If they say “no,” shake it off! Shake it off...

Why would Jesus do that?

We have grown accustomed to the idea that we should be the ones providing hospitality, not receiving it. People are supposed to come to us – not the other way around...or so we think. There is an important message here for the church. The attractional model of opening the doors and expecting people to show up no longer works. Instead, Jesus sends us out – not as experts with something to give – but as recipients, vulnerable to those who are ready to embrace the love and way of being that Jesus proclaims.

Not everyone will welcome you, says Jesus. Playing the victim or fighting back are not Jesus’ way – shake it off and move on.

There are plenty of people hungry for transformed lives. There are still people searching for the more that is God. There are people still longing for community, and love, healing, and peace. Jesus says, “go to them.” Receive from them. Be open to them. Put yourself out there. Expect rejection.

Jesus’ call to repentance wasn’t a “turn or burn” sermon preached through a bullhorn. His message of the kingdom being in us and among us was a call to be transformed by

¹ <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/01/16/377239011/by-making-a-game-out-of-rejection-a-man-conquers-fear>

God - to bring heaven to earth - and into our hearts – and to connect us all. He wasn't appealing to people to be more religious...just more loving. The people who had the hardest time with his message were often the most religious. His message was offensive to those who make the rules and draw the lines and decide who is in or out.

Jesus' call to repentance and his message of the Kingdom of God will always be offensive to those who cling to power by promoting hatred, intolerance, division, and violence.

Jesus, and those who promote love, compassion, service, inclusion, justice, and nonviolence continue to be rejected today – by Christians! Russell Moore resigned in 2021 as the head of the Southern Baptist Convention over the growth of Christian Nationalism in his own denomination and the convention's handling of sexual abuse cases. In an interview with NPR, he said, "Multiple pastors tell me, essentially, the same story about quoting the Sermon on the Mount, parenthetically, in their preaching—'turn the other cheek'—[and] to have someone come up after to say, 'Where did you get those liberal talking points?'" Moore said.

"When the pastor would say, 'I'm literally quoting Jesus Christ' ... The response would be, 'Yes, but that doesn't work anymore. That's weak,' he added. "When we get to the point where the teachings of Jesus himself are seen as subversive to us, then we're in a crisis."²

And this is where we are.

The word "Christian" has become so corrupted by politics and culture wars that many are choosing to abandon it because so much of what is called Christian bears no semblance to Christ.

I often wonder how Jesus would be received today. How long would it take to demonize him, diminish him? Who would be threatened? How would he be shut down and shut up?

And who would follow him? Who would receive him? Who would he send to share in his work?

² <https://www.newsweek.com/evangelicals-rejecting-jesus-teachings-liberal-talking-points-pastor-1818706>

Author Stephen Mattson says it would be good for Christians to regularly ask themselves, “Is my faith more a reflection of my political, cultural and socio-economic values and actions or a reflection of the values and actions of Christ?”

Before the disciples were sent out by Jesus, they sat at his feet to learn from him. What he asked of them, and asks of us, is not easy. They didn’t always understand. Sometimes they got it wrong. Their stories are included in the gospels so we can learn from their bumbles and misunderstandings what it means to shape our lives around the values and actions of Jesus. We have the benefit of their experience with Jesus.

May we be humble enough to learn the ways of Jesus, and courageous enough to put ourselves out there. And when we experience rejection – we don’t need to make a big drama out of it – or lick our wounds...just shake it off.