

The Messiah's Credentials

Mark 6:1-6

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Series B

Parallel Texts: Luke 4:16-30, Matthew 13:53-58

Companion Texts: Ezekiel 2:1-5, Psalm 143, 2nd Corinthians 12:7-10

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (1st Timothy 1:2)

Certain axioms seem to be consistent through the ages. For instance:

- Familiarity breeds contempt.
- We expect people to rise to the level of incompetence which we assign to them.
- It is difficult to break out of a stereotype mold.
- First impressions are lasting impressions.

Things have not changed much over the years. I'm guessing that it must have been about the same in the days when Jesus walked the earth.

Let's have a little mental exercise:

Place today's Gospel in a modern day scenario, perhaps closer to home: Imagine someone from this community --- perhaps a person with whom you went to school, a neighbor, a friend, maybe even a member of your own family --- someone with whom you had grown up. He is just an average person --- nothing special. Nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, a person so ordinary that you can not remember anything special about him.

Do you have someone in mind?

Now --- all of a sudden, he is back in town, visiting his widowed mother. He walks into this church, walks down the aisle, grabbing a pew Bible on the way, and reads a portion of Isaiah, starting in chapter 61: (from Luke 4:18-21)

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

He then closes the Bible, places it on the first pew and makes an announcement:

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Whoa! This ordinary person is saying that he is the One about whom Isaiah was talking! This person is saying that he is the Messiah!

What would your reaction be to such an announcement? How would you respond to someone standing up here in this church making that kind of claim --- especially if you had known that person from the time he was an infant?

Could you erase from your mind all the things that person had done as a child. Could you accept that things were now different? Could you accept the words as true, knowing the rest of the family?

That would be tough.

The people in that little middle-eastern village of Nazareth, about 2,000 years ago, had trouble accepting it, too.

Here was this local carpenter's son, wandering through town with a small rag-tag band of former fishermen following him. He has no visible means of support. He's dressed like a hippie.

He did not even take over the family business when old Joe died. He must be quite a disappointment to His mother Mary.

Too bad. So sad.

Now He is standing up in the Synagogue claiming to be the Promised One --- the Messiah. Suddenly He has gone too far! We will not stand for that! Enough is enough!

Our Gospel text records that Jesus was not able to do any great work there, except to heal a few sick people. Our Gospel also records that He marveled at their unbelief.

They did not believe because Jesus was too familiar to them. All they could see was the human side of our Savior. Oh, they marveled at His wisdom --- because all they could see was the carpenter's son who left home, and was now back for a visit.

They could not accept that all of God's promises and power could be in a form so much like themselves. They

could not cope with the mystery of God's incarnation when it hit so close to home.

While we look back at those citizens of Nazareth --- and wonder at their inability to recognize who was talking --- we fall into the same trap ourselves. We have trouble recognizing who Jesus really is. It is difficult because of our own pre-conceived notions of what we expect God to be like.

There are many reasons for unbelief: The way God is. The way God chooses to make Himself known. How God works. These are major stumbling blocks to faith.

We would much rather think of God as someone (or even something) far off, out of touch, not in tune with our every day existence --- too busy to be bothered with our problems.

We have trouble recognizing that He has taken on our humanity: He came as a little baby. He grew up in an ordinary working-class family. He made friends with common, ordinary people.

He was patient with those who ridiculed Him. He submitted to a horrible death on a cross --- an execution reserved for the very worst of criminals.

He did not come like a flash of lightning to strike us down. He came as a loving, humble brother to absorb the world's hurts, and to build us up.

It is hard to believe in a God like that, because we would rather be ruled by law than by love.

But God is love! That's just the way He is! It is unbelievable, humanly speaking, that the creator (on whose power and freedom we all depend) would allow Himself to be bound in swaddling cloths, pushed around by the common people, and then be nailed to a cross --- all for us!

If Jesus marveled at the unbelief of those people, what must He be doing today?

Imagine what His reaction is to our faith --- or lack of it! Those citizens of Nazareth had an excuse! We don't have one! Those people were blinded by tradition. They were steeped in generations of expectations of what the Deliverer was to be like.

This was new information that Jesus was giving them in that Synagogue that day. Their expectations of the Messiah were that of a powerful military genius who would rid them of the Roman occupation. They had difficulty making such a change in their thinking about someone so common to them in so short a time.

Even today, we have trouble seeing Jesus as the Savior as our own personal Savior as the one who died on the cross so each and everyone of us will have eternal life. We have trouble seeing Jesus as the who gives us the free gift of eternal life:

No strings attached. No limited warranty. No fine print in a contract. He gives it to us as a free gift of His love.

Perhaps our problem is that we allow Jesus to assume the role of a fictional character --- much like our television and movie actors. We allow ourselves to be lulled into a fictional theatrical scenario as we go through Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Confirmation, and Bible Class. We never allow Jesus to become real. We insist on characterizing Him like we do the characters in the worldly dramas around us.

We have even perfected the ability to turn Him on and off like we do our radios and televisions. We even try to bargain with Him. Promises, promises, all He ever gets is promises!

Like those citizens of Nazareth, we are caught in our own limited perspective --- one which we have created ourselves, so we do not have to face the reality that God is very real, very alive, and very active in our lives.

But to face the reality of God is no easy matter! In order to respond to the Gospel, we must recognize that our Lord was despised and rejected by men --- and that we (as His servants) are not above our master.

We will have our share of defeat. We will have our share of failure, hardship, heartache, and problems. In order to respond to the Gospel, we must accept where God has placed us in life, and do the work He has given us to do here.

This is not the profession or job for which you get paid. This is not the job that pays your mortgage. This is the work of spreading His Word to those who have not heard it yet.

That is why we had the Pentecost event a couple of months ago. On that first Pentecost, the disciples were equipped to go out and spread the Good News into the entire world.

We are part of that process. Each of us has been placed where we are for that specific task.

Recognize who Jesus really is. Know that He is active in your life. Hear Him --- reading the prophesy from Isaiah --- telling you that those words are fulfilled in Him.

Move out in faith in response to His message to you. Boldly do the work He has laid before you. Be His disciple! Amen. May the peace of God, which passes all [human] understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen (Philippians 4:7)