

July 9, 2006

Ezekiel 2:1-5

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

St. Mark 6:1-6

Mark 6

¹He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²On 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! ³Is 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. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Jesus had started to make a name for himself. He had been curing people. He stilled a storm and had even raised up Jairus' daughter. This was spectacular stuff and Jesus was getting quite a reputation. And, as his reputation was growing, he made a trip back home. People turned out to see the miracle worker who had been accomplishing all these mighty deeds. Folks wanted to see what all the excitement was about. And, there in the synagogue, was just Jesus. The neighbor boy.

People had come to see a bona fide, demon-casting, miracle worker. They found Jesus. They asked, "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! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary...?" They had known this boy since he was an infant. They'd watched him grow up. Were they supposed to accept Jesus as a miracle worker?

Religious leaders are important. And when Jesus – the neighbor boy - came with the title of an authority with the power of God it was not enough to just ignore him. The people were offended. Where did Jesus get off, telling them about their relationship with God?

People back home were not impressed with Jesus; he was just too familiar. They had seen him too many times. He had been a fixture around town for thirty years, and his family before that. An authority from God is supposed to be spectacular, new, unprecedented. But Jesus...Jesus had been around for a long time.

The home folks were not impressed because Jesus was too familiar. If Jesus was too familiar to impress a group of people who had known him for thirty years, how are we going to be impressed by him after two thousand years?

Jesus? Sure we know all about him. We've grown up with Jesus. He's very familiar, but at this point do we find him exciting? Do we look to Jesus as an authority in our lives?

The Bible is familiar. It's right there in its familiar place on the shelf or the coffee table. That's fine as long as it doesn't get presumptuous and try to set itself up as some sort of authority. ... The Church is a familiar place. We know all about it and its history. It's a good place but there's nothing new about the Church. We grew up with a church near-by; we've heard the stories; we all own Bibles. Christianity is very familiar.

Jesus keeps showing up in ways that are too familiar for us to get excited about him. "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ...This is Jesus' house and we don't always seem too excited about honoring Jesus.

We are called to "honor Jesus" by living out our Christianity everyday at all times in everything we do. Every time we see Jesus we are called to know him for who he is, the Son of God. The Savior with the universe-shaking reputation. Who has turned the world upside down, who has defeated death, who has brought the love of God into our lives.

That's a great reputation.

But Jesus keeps showing up in ways that are too familiar. We hear the stories,; we know the reputation; but when we come face to face with Jesus, it's just the neighbor boy.

Jesus may come to us as members of our family who need patience. Children who need to be listened to (even more than they need advice). Jesus comes as people we have lived with for years and haven't particularly liked for years, but who need understanding and acceptance. Christ comes with the opportunity to spend time studying and learning, getting to know things we've always assumed we already know. Familiar things.

Just as in this morning's Gospel story, Jesus has performed his mighty works, he has established who he is, he walks right into his home territory, and we say "Oh, it's just Jesus. He's been around for years."

We are talking about nothing less than God in human form. That's what Jesus has always been, God in human form. But the human form is too familiar and we say, "It's just the neighbors." And we find the image of God - boring.

Jesus has never had an easy time of it. He was born in a stable and it never really has gotten much better for him. ...But, the final outrage, the worst crime committed against Christ, was not the rejection or the humiliation or the beating or the cross. The greatest outrage against Jesus Christ has been committed by the Church. The Saducees and the Roman soldiers only crucified Jesus...The Church has made him boring.

We look to Jesus Christ and he is too familiar. He's the same old thing we've heard about since we could glue together a construction paper cross in Bible school. The whole story is too familiar to get excited about.

The people who had gathered in Nazareth's synagogue that day had come to see something that would excite them. They found Jesus. They refused to believe in a God who shows up as a familiar person. Raised in a humble family, familiar to everyone. They wanted an altogether glorious, supernatural Savior whose credentials would be obvious to everyone.

And, two thousand years later, it seems we are still waiting.

We want something out of Christianity besides the familiar. The familiar is boring.

There is great promise to being a Christian. God's love coming right into your life. God's love giving your life meaning and direction. You have strength to continue in the face of frustration. A person hears these promises and there is excitement. We will serve Christ!

And then Christ shows up. And he's the same old neighbor you've been avoiding for years. The same person you've been married to, the same group of people you wish your kids didn't go to school with. Christianity means God's love in human form.

We are to take God's love and use it to love these people whom we've known for years. People who are too familiar for us to get excited about.

The history of the Christian Church is a good one - when we are excited. Christians have always been willing to sacrifice and work. Christians give their time and their money. Christians look for an opportunity to take a strong stand for right against wrong. But Christians are not willing to be bored. And when we find Jesus coming to us in ways that we think are too familiar we are offended, just as the people of Nazareth were offended in this morning's Gospel lesson.

So we must make a distinction. Jesus Christ is familiar. I hope he becomes more familiar to all of us all the time. But Jesus is not boring. It is precisely the greatness of Jesus that he is familiar. Jesus comes into our lives constantly. He is with us everyday all the time. You can't get any more familiar than that. No matter where we are in our life and our faith, he is there. No matter how far away we have wandered from God, Jesus is at our elbow, ready with

God's love. Jesus wants to be familiar. He wants us to be used to being loved by God. He doesn't want us to be bored by it, but he wants us to be used to it.

So, the symbol of Christianity is the cross. Take up the cross and follow Jesus everyday. Follow Jesus through the constant service, the familiar day-in-day-out building of God's kingdom.

Christ may, occasionally, make great or unusual demands of us...He will certainly make constant demands of us. These familiar people in our families, in our community, the people we work with – these people are the image of Christ. And just because they are familiar does not make them any less the image of Christ. They make demands. Probably not spectacular, just steady.

We in the Church may find that boring. Like the Gospel lesson this morning, we may take offense.

"And he (Jesus) could do no deed of power there...and he was amazed at their unbelief."

Why can't Jesus do any mighty works today? When he is prevented, what is preventing him? The same thing that has always prevented him. He is too familiar. We've seen him too often and gotten too used to him. We want a relationship with God to come exploding into our lives with power and fireworks and totally surprise us.

But, Jesus is right here in our lives today, and we've gotten used to him. We've gotten too familiar with unlovable people. When it is suggested that those familiar faces are really God coming into our lives, we say, "No, that's just the neighbors." We are too familiar with hatred. When Jesus tells us that people who have made us angry and relationships that have been broken are actually an appropriate subject for prayer to God himself, we say, "No, that's not a religious question. That's just the neighbors." We've gotten used to hunger. We've learned to live with pride and greed – because they come to us every day all the time.

We are still not willing to see God if he comes to us everyday. We want something unusual. Something that requires a sacrifice. Something that requires a big commitment, and then is done.

Show us a flood and we'll give generously. Show us a vacant lot and we'll build a building. We can be counted on for spectacular Christianity in the face of spectacular wrongs.

But Jesus is usually pretty familiar. Jesus usually calls for courage, real courage. When the threat isn't over in a minute or in an hour. Christianity that calls for knowing God's love day after day. Real courage that is called up to face boredom. To overcome the other priorities that are trying to squeeze out a daily relationship with God.

Jesus is familiar. Jesus is not boring. Jesus Christ comes into our lives as a proven miracle worker. And the fact that he comes everyday in old familiar ways, only makes the miracle all the greater.