

Making Yourself at Home

Menno Mennonite Church

July 4, 2021

Purpose: To embrace the complicated reality of having Jesus with us that doesn't always make us feel at home.

Message: As people of the kingdom, we are invited into the awkward hospitality of the kingdom that stretches in new ways.

Scripture: Mark 6:1-13; Psalm 123

Synopsis: As followers of Christ, we are invited to step, time and again, into the unknown. Walking in faith, we come to questions often of "where shall I go", "How am I called", what comes next. Sometimes that call asks us to leave what is familiar and step into the new. As Jesus' encounter in Nazareth shows proclaiming the ultimate loyalties of God above all else can be tricky and yield unpredictable results. Yet Jesus invites us to put our trust in God as we go forth with little, relying on the provision of God as we encounter the new things God has for us. Especially on a day that asks us to proclaim and celebrate a nationalized "home" we do well to remember that our truest home is that of Christ's kingdom.

Mark 6:1–13 (NRSV)

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.
Then he went about among the villages teaching.

⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two,
and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff;
no bread, no bag, no money in their belts;
⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

¹⁰He said to them,
“Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place.

¹¹If 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.”

¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent.

¹³They cast out many demons,
and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

I wonder, what for you speaks of home? I will give you a second or two to bring it to mind. Yell it out if you like. I wonder what it is. I am guessing that for many of you it is very real, yet hard to put your finger on it; your favorite chair, the people you gather with, the endless horizon that we are blessed with, always present and palpable even as it is ever changing. Whatever it may be—close to hand or something of a far bigger mechanism—I am supposing it the stuff that puts you in mind of belonging, safety, identity. Being at the stage we are, stuffed animals have somewhat become the coin of the realm—we never leave home without them. Many times, we look for what makes us feel most safe and secure, placing us at home and at ease and name that as our home—the place where we belong, where our heart can reside without trouble, and we are always made to feel welcome and safe.

For the most part, we would include our faith in the “that which is home” list. There is great comfort in the familiarity of worship, being together, of having that which we are accustomed to and is familiar most accessible for us. Given the opportunity we may well seek out the experience of worship that is most agreeable to the preferences we might have. We look for the right music, the right tone and outlook that puts us at ease. Our faith roots and grounds us in the toughest times, rightly a comfort when all else seems unsettled. The words of faith are incalculably powerful when we need them most, one of the distinct privileges of this position is attempting to speak to them in difficult times in the best way that I know how. It can provide a home when all else is lost, becoming a beacon for that which we want most to find again. We should not underestimate the power being at home in our faith and with Jesus can have for us.

Yet, quite often, I am not sure if that is what Jesus set out to provide us. Solace sure; identity without a doubt. But there is always something a little bit more; an edge that pushes us beyond the comfortable and into the new in ways that can surprise us, even when we are most at home. This is what is on display in our text this week. Jesus is the native son made famously good—his name has become known throughout the land as the one who speaks of wonders and amazement, heals the sick, raises the dead (this comes directly after the miracle stories we sat with last week), so you would think that the reputation would proceed him. Of course, it does not, and that which they know of him doesn't particularly help either. They know him, his family, his history. There was no way a carpenter could be taken as seriously as this. So, they took offense at him, as our translation of Mark puts it so mildly.

The Greek suggests something of a bit more demand here. The word from which that phrase rises—Eskandalizonto—has the root Skandalon. This word makes another famous appearance in the New Testament; this time translated “Stumbling block” in Paul’s opening to the Corinthian letter.

The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... For Jews demand signs and Greeks demand wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those of us who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-24)

We do well to be reminded now and again that the gospel—all of the gospel—is not the tame workings of good home cooking that we sometimes make it to be. At the heart of both the Old and New Testaments lies the divine scandal of the love of God. In the old, it is the fundamental notion that YHWH God, maker of heaven and earth, chose one human family, flaws and all, and worked through them and generations to bless all other families, tribes, nations, and peoples of the earth. As a matter of basic human logistics that plan seems a bit absurd, maybe even a bit unfair and unjust, especially when you take the time to learn how that family so consistently messes up even their own blessing. Its all a bit much; yet that same blessing in that same family continues even to this very day.

The scandal at the heart of the New Testament is that God chooses to become human and live a human life in the form of Jesus of Nazareth who did signs and wonders, taught with wisdom and authority only to scandalize those whom he met, was crucified and *rose again*, ushering in the notion of the kingdom of God. From the human perspective this too seems a bit much, absurd and perhaps even well beyond what we would do with omnipotence and omniscience. Yet that was the plan, and Jesus rose from the dead all the same. The people who knew Jesus the best did not show him honor, but with scandalized by him. Perhaps the closer you come to the fullness of Christ, the more scandal there is to deal with. From the outside looking in there is more than enough here to scandalize. It may well be good news, but it doesn’t do much for the homey feel of a gospel that would make us comfortable.

Perhaps, though, that is not what the gospel is meant to do. As much as we would like to find our lives and homes with Christ, get good and comfortable, make a nest, put our feet up and have a nice restful nap, that is not always what we are promised. The other half of this story

places exactly in that place—being asked to give up much as disciples. After Jesus is rejected by his own hometown crowd what does he do to we disciple but turns around and says “right; your turn”. He sends the disciples out in pairs to do what he does, investing them with the same power and authority and the seeming caution that things may not always go well. He instructs them specifically to pack nothing to go along the way, causing them to be all the more vulnerable along the way. It seems a curious practice, but I think here too Jesus doing some teaching.

I don't know about you, but I am certainly in the camp of “tis better to give than receive” when it comes to hospitality. One of the mandatory experiences of witnessing the human condition I think is receiving the hospitality of others, especially those of far more modest means than your own. More times than I can count, I have been welcomed into the homes of strangers and folks whom, in my way of thinking, I was coming to help, only to have the script flipped to learn the precise opposite was happening. I recall one visit with a family literally in hiding for their lives in a leento come house who invited us in to tell us their harrowing story of near death experience and the likelihood that were they to be discovered they would meet their end, a story interrupted by the wife and story teller sending the family members to the street every 5 minutes to keep us supplied with coffee, fresh epanadas, and all the things that the demands of welcome required, hang the exposure and expense. I was awed by their story, their consistent faith in God's provision even here, and, of course, their incomparable hospitality.

What was being taught here was the evangelical practice of being a guest. As much as we would prefer to be the host and have the power, control, regulation and systems that comes with that position, in the scandalized gospel of Jesus we are not always asked to be the ones in control. Often we are invited into the adventure of being out of control, of being a bit on edge when we are in touch with what God is doing. Because when we give up the home court advantage and go and be the different people we are called to be, and that we as disciples are in the world, it leave room for the working of Spirit to accomplish far more than what we can ever dream or imagine. I think that Jesus sends us as disciples into the world without the stuff of the well thought out and planned expedition precisely because it puts us on edge. It is when we can participate in the scandalous nature of the gospel—getting out and being in the way of Christ with Christ that we can occupy our truest and fullest home the best—as members of the kingdom of God. The gospel is too compelling, too challenging, too revolutionary to invite us to do anything but to live to the fullest of our ability in the scandalous way of Christ.

Jesus invites us all as disciples not to put our trust in the systems of this world, big or small, but to rely ultimately on the working of a giving God. Ours is an existence that reminds us always that the world and its ways and means is not and can not be our home—not in any ultimate sense. Our comfort, our home, our anchor can only be that of the Christ who goes before us and invites us to come along and do the same. This is not natural or obvious for us. We are much more given to looking before we leap. We build institutions, support structures, commission studies and pre-fund liabilities before we set out on missions precisely so we can have the best chance of not needing to encounter the hospitality of the other. Some of that is good—we want to do the most good where we can without imposing on a hurting community.

But I think there is something too to shedding our North American assumption that nothing good can happen without the backing and blessing of large institutions. I wonder what sort of scandalous—stumbling block—sort of possibilities that might open up? Where might it lead us from here knowing God’s goodness all the time? How might we more fully hold the tension of the home that we know and love always remains less than fully our home? Where might we invited into the challenge of setting out for the journey, not being sure what we might find?

The gospel in its full scandalous glory is alive and well. This, right here right now, is not our home. Not fully. Not finally. May we seek always to follow in Jesus’ grace filled footprints, being ready to be amazed at where it may lead. Amen.