

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 7B - Proper 9B
July 7, 2024
Mark 6:1-13

Offended by Jesus

He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard Him were astonished, . . . And they took offense at Him. (Mark 6:1-3 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

With last week's celebration of my service in the Ministry in mind, it's good to hear our readings for today because they all demonstrate how difficult such service is. And this is in no way to pat myself on the back, but, like St. Paul, to boast in the Lord. After all, it is the Lord's ministry which He chooses to carry out through flawed men. Any success is due to Him and His Word alone. After all, Ezekiel was sent to preach to people who rebelled against God and His Word, transgressors, impudent, and stubborn (Ezek. 2:1-5). Paul suffered much for the sake of the Gospel - from those he was sent to, from nature, and from a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass him. And, of course, Jesus who was rejected by those in His hometown, and, of course, the chief priests, scribes, and the Pharisees.

Now as we hear of Jesus today, there doesn't seem to be much Gospel. That's to say, there doesn't seem to be much good news about the forgiveness of sins and eternal life that each of you has now been given through Jesus' death and resurrection. And while it seems the Gospel may be somewhat absent of Gospel, there is plenty of clear warning and threat of judgment.

First, there is the familiarity and contempt of the people of Nazareth, which God gives to us as an example and a warning. Nazareth's native son was preaching and teaching in the synagogue. "And they took offense at Him." It's as if the people said to themselves, "This man should not be speaking to us in this way! He's just a man, and we know Him well. He's no different than us and certainly no better! 'Is this not the carpenter...?'"

These Words from God, "they took offense at Him," are the first warning that today's Gospel speaks to all Christians, including to your preacher. And the warning is this: God does not intend for preaching to compliment you. Preaching is not designed to tell you how well you are doing. Preaching has but one purpose, and that is to focus all eyes and all ears upon Christ Jesus and Him alone. In order for God to show you a good picture of your Lord Jesus Christ, God

must first show you a bad picture of yourself. In order for you to receive a good, healthy dose of the doctor's medicine, you must first become aware of your disease. In order to benefit from the forgiveness that Jesus created for you through His death on the cross, God must first diagnose and warn you about your ongoing, continual need for forgiveness, because sin and death live within you. Nazareth "took offense at [Jesus]" because Nazareth did not want to hear such things.

That's really where things fell apart at Nazareth. Jesus "came to His hometown... and on the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue." Everything was fine until Jesus preached about Jesus. "And they took offense at Him." You and I both should take a clear warning from this. May God guard us against such unbelief and self-centered scandal! You and I each must allow our Lord Jesus to say what He must say to us and about us—we must allow our Lord Jesus to focus our attention exclusively upon Him—so that we indeed continue to receive the gifts of salvation and life that come only from Him.

The second warning of today's Gospel is this: a personal relationship with Jesus will do you very little good. Everyone in Nazareth had a personal relationship with Jesus. Everyone in Nazareth knew Him well, and on better days many could happily call Him friend. Yet Jesus "marveled because of their unbelief."

This is another serious warning, not only for us but also for many of our loved ones and neighbors who so earnestly avoid coming to worship! Today's Gospel does **not** emphasize knowing who Jesus is or having a personal relationship with Him. **Today's Gospel emphasizes that we hear the Words of Jesus and believe.** For a simple claim to know Jesus or a claim to have a personal relationship with Him might place you in danger of the fires of hell. Everyone in Nazareth knew Jesus! "And He marveled because of their unbelief." May God protect and keep each of us against false rest upon a supposed personal relationship with Jesus. May God instead continually open our ears to Jesus' Words!

Now, if the first two warnings were not serious enough for us, today's Gospel adds yet a third. The third warning—for you and me both—is this: the preaching of Jesus' Words **today**, and administration of Jesus' miraculous sacraments **today** remain as vitally important for us **today** as it was for the people of Nazareth. We know the Word remains vitally important for us—even when Jesus uses others to preach and administer it—because what happened in today's Gospel:

[Jesus] called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. And He said to them, "If any place will not receive you [as they have not received Me here in Nazareth] and they will not listen to you [as Nazareth will not listen to Me], when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

Now, the last thing that any of us should want is for Jesus to marvel at our unbelief, as He marveled at Nazareth's unbelief. Thus today's Gospel contains plenty of clear warning and threat of judgment.

Yet, if we take a closer look, we'll find there is Gospel to cool our thirst for righteousness. For what exactly happened when Jesus sent those disciples out to preach and to have "authority over unclean spirits"? Such power and authority can only come from Jesus, the Speaker of Life (Mark 5:41), the Tamer of Demons (Mark 1:32-34), the Voice of Creation (Mark 4:35-41), and the Destroyer of Death (Mark 16:1-8). Such power and authority can come only from Jesus, and yet Jesus now places that power and authority upon the lips of mere men. "He began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." They are not speaking of themselves, but the powerful Words of Jesus sound forth from their mouths, on account of the office they have been given. They themselves do not perform any miracles, but the miraculous Words of Jesus have been tied to the actions of their hands, in keeping with their office, so that the demons must flee. Jesus sends them out, and yet Jesus—Jesus alone—speaks the Word and performs the Work through the sent ones.

Today's Gospel transitions from a) Jesus sitting in the synagogue to b) Jesus sending others out—in His stead and by His command—to sit in synagogues.

Today's Gospel transitions from a) Jesus giving forgiveness and life directly to those who will hear and believe to b) Jesus now speaking through the mouths of others. Yet still giving the same forgiveness and life to those who will believe!

Today's Gospel transitions from a) the gifts of God coming directly from God Himself to b) the gifts of God miraculously indirectly delivered by means of Words and sacraments, preached and served by others. Yet the gifts of God are the gifts of God nevertheless!

The simple point of today's Gospel is this: You and I today receive from Jesus *nothing less* than what Jesus brought to Nazareth (even though they refused to believe). Yes, there is a strong warning that we earnestly believe, lest Jesus likewise marvel at our unbelief. But look at the wonderful Gospel in today's Gospel! First, Jesus "came to His hometown... and on the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue." Then "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." In today's Gospel, God mercifully assures us that:

- Where Jesus' Words are, there also Jesus is—even here among us!
- Where Jesus' miracles are—be they exorcisms of demons or celebrations of Holy Communion—there also Jesus is—even here among us!

- Where Jesus is, good and blessed things happen! That is really the Gospel in today's Gospel. Where Jesus is, good and blessed things happen. Here, as in Nazareth, Jesus sits with His people. Here, as in Nazareth, Jesus does His good work through the spindly and skeletal hands of others. Here, as in Nazareth, Jesus speaks—and when Jesus speaks, you receive every good gift! When Jesus speaks, all darkness, all sins, all demons, and even death itself gets held at bay. To Him be all the glory now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener
Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg
1297 E 900 Ave.
Shobonier, IL 62885
church: (618) 846-8383

personal cell: 330-204-4180