

Embracing bold discipleship in the face of rejection

Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:1-13

Jesus said, “Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin and in their own house.” When Jesus began to preach in his hometown, people were at first amazed at what he was saying. But then, as time went on, they began to recognize who he really was, and that’s when their attitude completely changed. They immediately began to discount what he was saying, because they knew him. They knew his family. He was the son of a carpenter, which was not as well-respected as some other careers. Their bias kept them from recognizing what Jesus was truly offering them in that moment, to the point that Jesus’ power was diminished. He was still able to heal some people. But what happened was his message was ignored. The wisdom that he shared in that moment had been rejected.

I’m sure there are some parents in our midst who can relate to this phenomenon. Parents often tell their children a lot of important things, numerous times, over and over again, and yet those children ignore it. Forget what it is that their parents are saying. That is until somebody in authority – a teacher or a minister – might say the same thing, and suddenly the child says, “Oh yeah, that makes a lot of sense.” Why is it that we, as humans, cannot truly listen to those people who have been with us? Who we’ve known? What causes us to hear that message and let it fall on deaf ears?

It’s really unfortunate that the people who grew up with Jesus, lived with him, could not bring themselves to move past their community bias. I wonder how many people in the temple were swayed by the naysayers. I wonder what the people in Jesus’ hometown were actually afraid of.

There are many times on one’s faith journey where one is faced with adversity and rejection. Following the Gospel is not simply about what we say, but the integrity that comes with acting on what it is that we say. Within Christianity, within communities of faith, and even within our own family circles, there’s often

a faction of people who feel entitled. Who wield their power to fulfill their own personal agenda. Putting aside the call from Jesus to care for the marginalized and powerless, to serve with compassion. To speak the truth in love, while standing up against injustice.

Last week in the Gospel of Mark, we heard the story of two people who trusted in God. Who had such a deep faith in Jesus that they believed that what Jesus offered them would be healing and wholeness. We heard the story of the woman who was hemorrhaging who knew that if she just reached out and touched Jesus' robe, she would be healed. She was. We heard about the priest whose daughter was unwell, knowing that if Jesus just came, he could heal his daughter. And Jesus did.

Today's Gospel story is quite different, however. After hearing these stories of great faith, suddenly, we're hearing a story that begins with people being astounded at what Jesus was saying. But once they recognized who he was, his power and his intentions were suddenly questioned. So unlike that woman of deep faith, the people in his own town doubted. At one point, they even took great offence at what Jesus was saying and proclaiming. And that's when we hear that it was Jesus who was amazed at their unbelief. His own people were not willing to accept the divinity that God had given him. I wonder who we have chosen to not listen to in our own communities of faith. Who have been prophets among us that we have rejected or dismissed?

Being people of faith, we are being called to be more intentional; to live a life with intention. As we began the series on the practice of Sabbath, we explored what it means to rest in order to restore our spirits. This other aspect that I mentioned before of Sabbath is that we are also called to embrace. Sabbath is about embracing intentionality. To care for how we do and what we do. Living with intention calls us to stop falling into patterns around us, where we do not take time to consider how and what we do. When we practice Sabbath, we are saying that we will not do what everyone else does just because that is the norm. We will face rejection. We will face people who will doubt us, who will discard us. But God is calling us to keep and remain strong in doing what we are called to do, because of what God has taught us. Instead of saying that we are just going to do what is normal, we are saying that we are going to be deliberate in our choices. By choosing to live a life of faith, we are accepting the call of discipleship. We are accepting the call to reflect God's grace to others. To share what we have been

freely given people around us. And what we are being given is love, a sense of belonging, forgiveness, acceptance, and purpose.

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, reminds them that they have been adopted as children of God through Jesus Christ. It is our covenant with God, and through that that we have received redemption. We have been restored. Jesus' response to the rejection in his own town was not to give up, but to persist. To move forward, answering God's call to heal and serve. Jesus demonstrated this tenacity even further, when he called his disciples to leave what they had behind. To go out into the world. To share the good news. And if the people they encountered did not offer hospitality and instead rejected their message, they were instructed to dust off their feet and to move on. What Jesus is reminding us is that we are not held responsible for the *responses* to our ministry. We are being held responsible for our own faithfulness. We are called to witness to the Good News, and to serve God with boldness and faithfulness.

A year or two, a colleague of mine who was ministering in the US shared some prayers that speak about bias. This came from a podcast by *The Centre for Action and Contemplation*, and I wanted again to share this Community Bias Prayer, which I believe speaks to the messages in the scriptures today. Here's the prayer:

“Inspirer of holy boldness and humble bravery, give me the humility to learn from my community, along with the courage to differ graciously from my community. Seeking truth, even when my companions are unwilling to see it or accept it. Help me remain humbly loyal to truth, even when I am misjudged and rejected by my community for doing so. Amen.”

Imagine the people in that temple listening to Jesus, when suddenly they were like, “Oh, we know who this guy is. We shouldn't be listening to him.” But what if somebody in that crowd had the courage and the boldness to go against what those people were saying, and to truly hear the message that Jesus was proclaiming? How would that have changed things?

Marva Dawn, in her book entitled *Keeping the Sabbath Holy*, reflects on the difference between “choosing” and “embracing”. Marva explained that she felt that she needed a stronger word than “choosing” to choose faith. She wanted something that would capture the intensity with which we are called to Sabbath keeping. She writes:

“That we choose something doesn’t necessarily mean that we incorporate it thoroughly into our lives. To *embrace* is to accept with gusto. To live to the hilt. To choose with extra intentionality and tenacity.”¹

We can say that “I chose to go to church today”, or “I chose to engage in a Sabbath practice”. But to *embrace* worship, to embrace one another is different. It requires our whole beings, our entire spirit. Engaging in Sabbath practice brings us to a depth of connection with God that doesn’t exist if we simply choose to go to church because we’re supposed to. Our depth of connection with God, our deep and abiding faith comes when we remember why we are serving this community with love, and why we are accepting all people. When we look at another human being, we are being called to see the face of Christ in them. We are being called to be patient, understanding, gracious, kind. Remembering that the person we are speaking to is a child – a beloved child – of God. Who has been uniquely made. Who has great things to offer this world.

Jesus didn’t tell the disciples to follow him just because. Jesus offered them water that would ensure that they would never be thirsty again. Jesus offered them forgiveness, so that they would be free from the burdens they carried. And Jesus offered them love and acceptance, even when society rejected them. Jesus offers us the same things. Jesus offers us mercy; Jesus offers us healing.

The passage from Ephesians today reminds us of God’s love for us; love that is excessive, tender, and richly abundant. As beloved as we are, we are lifted up into something far greater than ourselves. We are blessed in Christ; we are chosen in Christ, and we are destined for adoption through Christ. So on this day of Sabbath, I encourage you to not simply *choose* to be here, or choose to speak to one another. I implore you to embrace one another, for you are all children of God. Let us embrace what God has freely given us, and then share it with all in this world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

¹ Marva Dawn, **Keeping the Sabbath Wholly; ceasing, resting, embracing, feasting**, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 135.