



WHERE WESTMINSTER
GATHERS FOR WORSHIP

Can you believe it?

A Sermon on Mark 6:1-13

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Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 5, 2015

Mark 6:1-13

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.

Listen to this: "Jesus could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief." Does God need us to believe? Because it sounds like God needs us to believe. That can't be right. God didn't need us to believe when, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God didn't need us to believe on the first evening, in the first meadow, when the lightning bug glowed for the first time. God didn't need us to believe when he took some dirt and blew into it and said, "Good morning, Adam."

God doesn't need us to believe. If God needs us for power, then that's a pretty anemic God, is it not? I tend to be afraid of people who are afraid of people taking away the power of God. I hear people who

say, "We need to pass laws, so that the government won't take God away." "We need to get legislation to protect God from a hostile culture." "If we don't put our foot down, there's not going to be a God. They'll take God out of the schools, out of the pledge, and where will we be? We need to stand up and defend God."

A God, who needs us for protection? Ha! There's a little story in the Old Testament about a time when David and a few of his buddies were bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the barn for the night. You remember the Ark of the Covenant, don't you? If you don't, you remember the movie a couple of years ago called "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Okay, ten years ago. All right, thirty years ago. Maybe you're too young to remember, and I'm getting too old!

The Ark of the Covenant was built soon after Moses took the Tablets down off the mountain. They built this cabinet and carried it around. For a nomadic people, it was like a movable temple. One night, as I said, David and his buddies were parking the Ark in the barn; and as they were going on to the threshing floor, the oxen stumbled, and the Ark began to slide off the wagon. There was this fellow named Uzzah, who thought in an instant, "I need to save this Ark!" When he reached out to grab the Ark and save it from falling, well, he would have been better off to lick his finger and stick it into a 220-volt socket. That was the end of Uzzah. David was a little mad at God for that one. "Look, he was only trying to help you out, Lord." The moral of the story is "God doesn't need to be saved. God doesn't need us for power."

But hear again! "Jesus could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief." Why does Mark say that? When, in fact, Mark knows that Jesus doesn't need anyone to believe, in order to do miracles.

When Jesus conducts his first miracle, he heals a lame man in a synagogue. Those around him could hardly believe it. "What is this, a new teaching?" they say. When the storm is raging, none of his disciples believe. They're afraid, but Jesus stands up and stills the seas. "Who is this that causes the wind and the waves to obey him?" When time expired, and so did the little girl, Jesus wanders into her room to raise her up. The people laughed and said, "You're a little late!" Jesus says, "Talitha cum! Little girl, get up!"

The dead don't believe, do they? Unbelief is all over Mark's Gospel, but it never stops the power of God. So why does Mark say, "...he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief"?

Does it help when I say, "I don't know"? Except that I do know that in Mark's Gospel, believing makes all the difference in the world. If it's one thing that Mark is trying to get us to do, it is to believe.

So we have this story of Jesus, the Son of God, coming home. Jesus is the Good News. But the problem is they already know Jesus. They know Jesus, and Jesus isn't so much Good News as he is old news. That's the problem with hometowns. Everyone knows you; everyone remembers you. The best part about leaving town is you can reinvent yourself. You can start over. It's the good news. Like you're born again. The past is finished and gone. It's the same words we say when water splashes into that Font. We're new creations! The past is finished and gone. But not everyone in the room believes that. The memory of the old creation still just hangs around. Some folks won't let us get away with grace, always wanting to dredge up some old memory. "I know who you really are. I remember that time when you said this, and you did that. I know exactly what to expect from you." And Jesus could do no deed of power, and Jesus was amazed at their unbelief.

The past is finished and gone! Not everyone believes that. Most of the time we don't trust it for ourselves. The power of God washes all over us. Jesus could do no deed of power there, except that he put his hands on a few sick people and healed them. I wonder if they knew they were made well or whether they just stayed sick. He was amazed at their unbelief.

But those who believe, those who know who he is, make all the difference in this Gospel. Ask the woman who reached out her hand in the crowd. Jesus said, "Who touched my garment? Who touched me?" "Jesus, the crowd is pressing in all over you. What do you mean 'Who touched me'?" And out of the crowd came a trembling woman who said, "I did, because I know who you are." "Ahh, your faith has made you well." In Mark's Gospel, those who believe, well, it makes all the difference in the world. And in our world, those who believe, well, it makes all the difference in the Gospel.

I'm reminded of Reginald Denny, the truck driver who, many years ago, was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was pulled out of his truck during the Los Angeles riots, kicked and beaten. Someone threw a brick at his head. We saw it all on television. At the trial Mr. Denny was seen shaking the hands of those who had beaten him. Can you imagine shaking the hands of people who beat you? Why, it reminds me of Jesus, the Son of God. A news reporter said of the scene, "It is understood that Mr. Denny has some degree of brain damage." He could do no deed of power there, because of their unbelief. Believing in this world makes all the difference in the Gospel.

Not long after body and blood were scattered and splattered, and the smell of gunpowder was still in a room, I watched a clip of a MSNBC reporter who stood outside the church in Charleston, South Carolina, and was so taken back by the singing of hymns that he could no longer report the news. Look, in this world, when the Church comes into town, most people don't expect any deed of power to come forth from it. They know who the Church is. They've known the Church throughout their growing up. They know the Church is filled with hypocrites. Some say that the Church is filled with bigots. "The Church is so delusional. People who drink the Kool Aid." But, you see, weren't they all surprised? That reporter was so surprised, standing out on a street corner. He was supposed to cover the news, but the old news just wouldn't come out. The Good News had caught his heart and his head. And believing in the power of Jesus Christ in this world makes all the difference in the Gospel. It shines in the darkness. Look, believe the Good News - today! Take torn-up body and spilled-out blood and resurrect it.

Believe the Good News – today! I believe that you can take one person by the hand and raise that person up. It may be by saying some word of gentle kindness. Today, I believe that you can stand up and still someone's storm, just by listening. Today, in a world full of demons and devils, be not afraid. "The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him...One little word shall fell him." Today! The sun will set, and Jesus will be amazed because of all the acts of his power that have been done through the hands and hearts of those who believe.