

“House to House”

Mark 6:1-13

For the past month or so, I have been guilty of ‘solicitation’... no, not THAT kind... but rather, have been ‘soliciting’ your input on future sermon topics. I have been asking you to submit those issues you might have questions about, wishing to gain more information on them from a Christian, Biblical point of view. Well, to begin our time together today, **I** would like to ask **you** a ‘question’... in order to gain some ‘information.’ **WHY ARE YOU HERE?** Now, I don’t mean that from a deep philosophical ‘meaning of life’ perspective... but rather, ‘why are you here’ in this church today? Why did you leave the comfort and security of your personal ‘**house of rest**’ to come to this ‘**house of worship**?’ Just ONE word. (Don’t be shy!)

Possible answers: **Friends. Fellowship. Family** (present, past). **Obligation. Praise/Sing/Music. Prayer. Ponder God’s Word. Life’s Purpose** (Find it... Fulfill it).

My point is that there are any number of reasons why you come so faithfully to this ‘holy huddle’ in order to **“practice the presence of God.”** That for the **purposes of praise for, prayers to, proclamation and people of** the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, this is a *pretty darn good place* to do those. So WHY are there so many empty pews?! We should have an SRO crowd, right? While we might come up with many reasons (excuses!) that are *outward*-focused toward various external circumstances, I would ask you to look more *inward*. When was the last time YOU had a conversation with someone about an issue of Christian FAITH? When was the last time you spoke of how YOUR faith is lived out **in and through** the context of a faithful, delightful body of believers known as ‘the church?’ When you have a good dining experience at a restaurant, don’t you tell others? Or a movie? A car-repair shop? A hairdresser? Shouldn’t it be just as easy to talk about your Church?

I would hazard to guess, however, that for most of us the answer would be ‘NO.’ And why is that? I KNOW that your Christian faith is important to you... or you wouldn’t be here this morning. That being the case, there are yet for each and every one of us burdens we carry that inhibit our ‘bearing the fruit’ of that faith for others to ‘taste.’ To borrow from Paul’s words, we all bear certain ‘thorns in our flesh’ that ‘cause us pain’ or ‘bring us pause’ when it comes to

engaging others for the 'sake of Christ.' And just as it was unclear just what kind of 'thorns' the Great Apostle was speaking of... **physical** pain... **spiritual** conflict... **emotional** or **psychological** battles... (Perhaps ALL of the above)... so too do WE have various challenges to overcome in being the type of Christian witness God intends us to be.

And so, for the next few minutes, let us consider how we deal with those 'thorns' in our flesh. Just as we have acknowledged in our opening hymn, "Lord, You Give (us) the Great Commission," let us give thought to just how we are to LIVE OUT that 'Great Commission.' Whether in our family homes, our church 'family residence,' or in our workplaces and neighborhoods, we MUST be mindful of how to GROW in that calling that YOU and I share with the first disciples: to GO... **"House to House"**...

Our Gospel Lesson begins with Jesus returning to His hometown... preaching in his 'home church.' This passage has always had special significance to me personally. There were times in my 'career' as an ordained minister when I wistfully looked toward coming back to my 'home church' to continue my ministry. And it was those words of Christ that kept ringing in my ears: ***"Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown..."*** (Mark 6:4)

And perhaps it was His experiences in that 'hometown' of his that, at least in part, kept me from returning to serve the 'Risen Christ' in 'Red Stick.' Most of all, though, it was that line out of our Lord's Prayer: *"Thy will be done, (Father) on earth as it is in heaven..."* NOT 'My will be done...' (Which we can too readily substitute...) But what about all you 'lay ministers' out there... what can you, members of the 'priesthood of ALL believers, learn from Christ's experience with his 'homeboys' and girls? How might what our Lord encountered in his 'native land' prepare you for what you find in your calling to proclaim the Gospel...?

Well, for one, it was difficult for those natives of Nazareth to not associate this 'divine' teacher and miracle worker with his very 'human' family. Did you not find it interesting to hear the people speak of Jesus as ***"the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon,"*** as well as talking about ***"His sisters?"*** Jesus had a BIG family, right? (Which got me to thinking... always dangerous... about a question: *"Would they be considered His 'half' brothers and sisters? Well of course they would... Because without Jesus, they would be 'incomplete'... only half the person that they should be."* LIKE US! 😊)

ANYWAY, because they all knew him mostly as 'one of the kids' of Joe and Mary, they would have a hard time imagining him as this powerful, super-natural man of God. As Mark wrote, **"they were astounded...** (asking) **Where did this man get all of this?"** And he goes on to say that **"they took offense** ('stumbled') **at him."** (Mark 6:3) Part of that 'offense' was also likely connected to his background... or lack of same. When they decried, **"Is not this the carpenter?"** they were no doubt demeaning his simple upbringing. 'This is no trained religious teacher, or scholar of Scripture. He's a 'woodworker,' for crying out loud!' (Little did they realize that Jesus didn't merely 'work with wood'... but with the CREATOR of it!) In all this, those 'fellow townspeople' of Jesus bore witness to an old saying (HEY, I'm due!): *"Familiarity breeds contempt."*

In the same way, those who have known us all our lives can cause us to be a bit... hey, a LOT... self-conscious about speaking up on behalf of that 'Son of a Jewish carpenter.' They know our **families...** the good, the bad, and the... well, you know. They know our **history**. Who are WE to talk about the Son of God? What kind of theological 'ed-ju-mi-cation' do WE have? One of the greatest 'thorns' in our flesh is the one that causes self-doubt in our ability to witness to the power of Jesus Christ. That we're just not WORTHY or CAPABLE of speaking to someone about this **highly personal issue of faith in Christ**.

Well, for one, it is exactly because it is so **PERSONAL** that we should be able to speak **PERSONALLY** about our faith. Not what it *should* do for someone else but what it *has* done for you! When it comes to '**families,**' what really matters with regards to your faith journey is your **HOLY** family... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... and your **CHURCH** family... who admittedly can sometimes act in NOT-so-holy ways. But we are ALL a 'work in progress'... some of us just need a little more 'progress' than others... 😊

And as far as our '**history,**' the only one that matters is 'HIS-STORY.' How Jesus takes the mistakes of our past and 'casts them as far as the east is from the west.' 'His story' is all about **forgiveness**. The core of the Good News of the Gospel. **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."** I think that this also relates to the role of our 'education' in the Christian faith. Should we know the Scriptures better? OF COURSE. That goes for ME too! But I believe that an old rule of sales is just as applicable in our communication of that Good News:

People don't care what you know until they know that you care." It is our CARE for one another that truly bears witness to just how PERSONAL our faith is to us...

But our motivation to share with others our faith, our trust, in God is not merely because of the PERSONAL benefit we have received. It is also God's **PURPOSE** for our lives. RIGHT after the disappointment that Jesus suffered in his hometown, we read that ***"he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve to send them out two by two... and gave them authority."*** (Mk 6:6-7) He also instructed them that ***"wherever you enter a house... if 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."*** (Mark 6:10-11) Upon hearing these instructions, we read that ***"they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them."*** (Mark 6:12-13)

Jesus, our example, was resilient. As much as he had been let down by his 'homies,' He immediately continued to fulfill his PURPOSE... to go and teach what his very own had rejected. He 'sent out' His disciples (that verb 'send out' has the same root as "apostle"), pairing them up, and giving them the authority, the carpenter's 'tools,' that they needed. And just as he did not dwell on what might be deemed a 'failure' in Nazareth, he encouraged his 'apostles' to not be disappointed when things didn't go well... but rather, to 'shake it off.'

You and I are Jesus' modern-day 'apostles,' given power by His authority to do great things in His Name. Our ministries are not to be done 'solo', but working together with other 'apostles,' encouraging one another. And when things don't go the way that we had hoped, we don't dwell on those 'failures,' but 'shake it off.' In a sinful, broken world, we too are to live a life of repentance, helping others to deal with their 'demons,' and pray healing for those who are sick... of mind, body, and spirit.

Jesus is the example for the purpose we are to live out in our lives. An example another Apostle, Paul, bore witness to. Just as Paul spoke of the thorns in his flesh, even more so did Jesus have his own 'thorns' to bear. Even aside from those physical 'thorns of iron' that held him to the cross, He carried the thorns' of **rejection, betrayal, and suffering**. And just as Paul

asked for his 'thorns' to be removed, so too did Jesus. BOTH of whom had their requests denied. God's answer to Paul might also be considered the Father's response to His Son: ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."*** (2 Cor. 12:9) In the 'weakness' of the Cross, the Father's power was made perfect in His Son... through His all-sufficient grace.

As you and I seek to fulfill God's purposes for our lives, we too will carry many thorns. Some may be removed. Others will not. In our journey through life, may we continue to rely not merely on our own strength, but in the power that only comes through grace of God in Jesus Christ. A journey that is intended to take us from OUR '**House**' to THIS '**House**' to THOSE '**Houses**'...

CHARGE

In our passage from Mark, we read that ***"he could do NO deed of power there..."*** (6:5) WHY? Because He was **incapable?! HARDLY!** Perhaps it was tied >> to the following statement: ***"He was amazed at their unbelief."*** SO OFTEN, the miracles of Jesus are related to the person's BELIEF. As he said to the woman last week, ***"Daughter, your FAITH has healed you."*** As we seek to bring to others the healing Jesus has brought to us, we pray that He will not say about US, 'I am amazed at their unbelief.' Instead, may we hear God's words to our fellow Apostle Paul: ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."***
WHEN WE ARE WEAK, GOD WILL BE OUR STRENGTH!

As we go forth from this place... even in our **weak, thorny selves**... we know that we do not go alone. But that the Spirit of the living God...