

## **“The Journey: Read the Instructions”**

Salado UMC—8 July 2018: Seventh after Pentecost

Preaching Text: Mark 6:1-13—Year B

Salado, Texas 76571

**“In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a dark wood  
where the straight way was lost”**

—(Dante Alighieri: 1265 - 1321, *The Divine Comedy*).

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When the village of Nazareth rejected Jesus, I suspect it was about bigger issues than his origins. Funny thing about people, our pride is too often wounded. Our feelings are easily hurt—frequently, yet not deliberately. We are—in a word—hypersensitive. I read an amusing story recently about hypersensitivity:

**. . . most Jews do understand the risk of hypersensitivity. There is the story about Goldbloom, doing well in the rag trade in Stepney, who has to make a dash for Euston to sort out a problem with his supplier in Glasgow. As the night sleeper pulls out, he realises he has left his overnight bag behind. Luckily the man occupying the other berth in the sleeper compartment has a spare pair of pyjamas, which he lends Goldbloom, and tells Goldbloom he can use his razor in the morning. But when Goldbloom asks if he can also borrow his toothbrush, he politely declines. The next evening, when he returns from Glasgow, Goldbloom’s wife asks him how the journey went. ‘Not bad,’ says Goldbloom, ‘but did I meet an anti-Semite’** (*“Short Cuts”* by Stephen Sedley, in *London Review of Books*, 10 May 2018)!

Hear the day’s lesson:

**6 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. <sup>2</sup> On 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! <sup>3</sup> Is 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. <sup>4</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” <sup>5</sup> And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup> And he was amazed at their unbelief.**

**Then he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup> He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup> He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup> but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup> He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup> 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.” <sup>12</sup> So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup> They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them (Mark 6:1-13, NRSV).**

We cannot read about Jesus' life in the four Gospels without having a desire for knowledge about Jesus' childhood years; up until he turned age thirty. These years are lost to history. These years have been a source of much speculation. Nature abhors a vacuum and so do people. We make up stuff if we don't know the answer. With this in mind, some speculate that Joseph died and left Mary with a house full of children, of whom Jesus was the first-born. Jesus spent his youth caring for his mother and siblings. Without hard-historical facts, this seems reasonable. No situation could have been more human for the Son of God than to be a guardian for his mother and a house-full of small children. Could this be where Jesus developed a deep understanding regarding children? What happened in those years perhaps prepared Jesus for what was to come. These were not wasted years, for in the "fullness of time" the signal came to Jesus that "now is the time."

After Jesus' baptism by John, Jesus' life is a continuous flurry of activity. Jesus constantly moves from one event to the next. Jesus interrupts his activity by deliberate efforts to reflect on and communicate with God. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus moves quickly from one occasion to another. The crowds remain amazed at the miracles and the wisdom of his teaching. Jesus has selected the apostolic team and the ministry is making great headway. Then . . . abruptly . . . Jesus has a disheartening experience. While at home in Nazareth, Jesus encounters a mixture of wonder, resentment, and hostility.

Obviously, the visit was not a social one. Jesus did not return to simply call on old friends and family. Rather, Jesus arrived as a rabbi with disciples in tow. As a travelling or an itinerant rabbi might do, Jesus went to the synagogue. He began to teach. Mark reports that those who heard him were astonished. Then, like a typical group of hometown critics, they began with the usual disqualifying remarks: "Where did this individual get all of this (think here of football coach or a local preacher)? Just who does he think he is? What is this wisdom and deeds of power have been given Jesus? We can just hear the critical rhetoric: "Hey, we've known this fellow since he was a kid. We know his mama and his brothers and sisters. He is just a carpenter. He is no better than we are. Where does he come off talking like that to us? We know this Jesus!" Mark says they took offense at him. Given the information in Mark, we might wonder why those in Nazareth had such a strong reaction.

It is Luke who enlightens us as to what this hometown boy said that made people so angry. Luke reports that when Jesus came to the synagogue he was given the scroll of Isaiah, and unrolled it to the place where it read:

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Isaiah 61:1-2).**

Jesus handed the scroll back to the attendant, sat down, and said: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Clearly, here Jesus proclaimed himself as Messiah. At the end of his discourse, the congregants were both amazed and enraged. They ran Jesus out of town. They took him to the

brow/summit of a hill on which Nazareth was built. They would have hurled him off a cliff, “but he passed through the midst of them and went on his way” (Luke 4:16-29).

Plainly, Jesus/the disciples chafed under the rebuke by people expected to be supportive. Jesus’ said: “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown and among their own kin, and in their own house” (a litotes = understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary). Because of their unbelief, Mark reports that Jesus did no mighty works among them, except for a few healings.

When we experience rejection from those we from whom we expected support, we habitually withdraw. We lick our wounds and re-evaluate our situation. Not Jesus. From his positive response prior to his Nazareth return, Jesus trusts God for a positive response after his departure. Thus, Jesus ratchets up his work. Until now the disciples have been spectators. Suddenly they get actively involved. Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power over unclean spirits and the authority to heal. Jesus sends them on a formidable mission. Having witnessed an aching rejection, they perhaps feared likely outcomes. Yet, Jesus arms them something without which no disciple dares begin such a task. Jesus gives power and authority.

When we look at what ministry needs doing, we think glumly: “We do not have the power to do this,” then we miss the core of the gospel message. What God calls us to do, God empowers us. If the only things that happen in our church/world are the things we do in our own power, then we have reason for concern. God calls. God empowers. The times in ministry in which I ended up frustrated, and physically and emotionally fatigued were when I was functioning out of my own power. Ministers can be full of pride on occasions—sometimes many occasions!

Jesus sent the disciples on their mission without food, money, or even a change of clothing. They were to trust God to provide for such needs. The people they visited would provide the necessary wherewithal. They were not to stay at any place where they were unwelcome. If rejected, they were to “shake the dust off their feet” and leave. The power and authority of Jesus did not forsake them. “They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.”

I heard someone once say that Jesus promised three things to those who followed him: “They would be absurdly happy, entirely fearless, and always in trouble.” The first disciples have, at this point in the journey Mark communicates, experienced the first two. The latter is yet to come—this is a word to the wise. Amen.

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