

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, July 4, 2021

“Jesus Had Family Too”

Vicar Kellie shared some reflections with me this week that challenged me to look at our texts a little differently. I will quote her:

“Independence day is as much about righteous dissent as it is about apple pie and fireworks. Today, we celebrate that our nation has certain freedoms because of a group of rebels who, 245 years ago, took a stand against an empire. We stand in a church which honors a single rebel who, 504 years ago, took a stand against a larger empire. And what a joy it is to know that our spirits live eternally with God because of a rebel who, 2000 years ago, took a stand against an even larger empire still.”

In our Gospel for today, Jesus heads back to his hometown of Nazareth and runs into a problem... he lost his power among the people. People had a hard time believing in Jesus as anything other than a local kid. The locals knew Jesus as a carpenter, because that's what his dad, Joseph did. But here, Joseph isn't even named. Maybe the people of Nazareth still questioned Joseph as Jesus' dad. Mary was named. His brothers were named... James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. And sisters were around, but unnamed in this text. In an honor/shame culture of the first century, you weren't supposed to operate outside of your family's social/work status. If your dad was a carpenter, you were to be a carpenter. So, people were offended that Jesus' was teaching in the synagogue... even though they were astounded at his teaching and his wisdom.

That's when Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” Here Jesus refers to himself as a prophet. Prophets did have special callings and gifts that took them out of their family of origin to do their work. Prophets were also known to be killed for speaking against power.

Can you identify with the people of Nazareth who are rejecting Jesus as a prophet? They knew him and had their mind made up about him. I think we are quick to judge people because of their history.

So, after experiencing rejection in his home town, Jesus went to neighboring villages and towns. He called the 12 disciples together and began to send them out two by two... with specific instructions.

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. They were to preach repentance and heal people.

Our God is a sending God. God partners with us and sends us out to carry the message about Jesus everywhere we go. So, at your family gatherings today, or at work, or on the court, or in school, or out in public, you represent the faith. The mission field is everywhere. This is a weighty thing to think about... that we represent the faith everywhere we go, especially when we know that we sin and fall short every day. We say send someone else.

Why two by two to households? The strategy changed because Jesus experienced rejection in the synagogue. Now it was to households. Why two by two? You always have a support system. You have a witness to what is being said or done. You have someone to process with. Plus, it is safer to be with another person as you head off into unknown villages. Sometimes you can't pray, but the other person can pick you up.

Why does Jesus tell the disciples to travel light? They are more vulnerable and have to learn to rely on the hospitality of others. When you have so much, you don't open yourself to allowing God or others to bless you. With less personal possessions to think about or worry about, you have to rely more on God and God's daily provision for you.

Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. The temptation might be to find someone with better accommodations or better food. With this instruction, you are to stay in one place and honor the people who are offering you hospitality.

And if you experience rejection, know that it will happen. Shake the dust off your feet and let it go. Go on to the next house.

Even in the face of rejection, Jesus encourages his disciples to keep trying. Don't give up in sharing my kingdom of justice and love with the world. Jesus is also reminding the disciples not to worry about the outcomes or success rate of your mission. He just talked about seeds and how the kingdom is breaking in. Just do your part, plant seeds, and rely on the hospitality of others.

Kellie is right, we are here in the Lutheran church because Luther made a stand for the free gift of the Gospel. God's word continually is reforming us and challenging us and the power structures around us. Prophetic voices are calling for justice. May we have ears to hear and minds to understand that God will not rest until Jesus' kingdom is fulfilled and he returns. In the meantime, we are called and sent out to share the good news in word and deed.

Amen