

Jesus--Love Him or Leave Him!

Mark 6:1-13

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There was a boss who felt like he wasn't getting any respect. And so one morning he went to a sign shop and bought a sign that read, "I'm The Boss". He then returned to work and taped it to his office door.

When he returned from lunch that day, he found that someone had taped a note to his sign which said, "Your wife called while you were out. She wants her sign back!"

Sometimes no matter who you are, you don't get the respect you are due!

Jesus experienced that dynamic in this morning's stories from the gospel of Mark. Two different groups of people encounter Jesus. One group rejects Jesus, while the other embraces Jesus with belief and obedience. Why do you think Jesus elicits such polar opposite responses? Why would some hate Jesus, while others love him?

When Jesus saw how the people of Nazareth responded to him, he noted that "Prophets are not without honor, except in their own hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."¹ The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus because they couldn't bear the thought that someone in his class (he was a construction worker, a day laborer...), and someone with his family history (people wondered who his father really was...)--the people of Nazareth couldn't bear the thought that such a person could rise to prominence as a man of great wisdom and power.

Sometimes we think we know someone so well that we can't imagine them reaching certain heights or achieving certain goals. Garrison Keillor is from St. Paul, Minnesota. When people come to visit him, he likes to take them to the bronze sculpture of Lucy, from the Peanuts comic strip family. You see, Charles M. Schulz was from St. Paul. And when he first came up with his idea for the comic strip, he presented it to the local newspaper. Only, the local newspaper rejected it; the editors said it wasn't imaginative, clever or very funny. Despite that preliminary assessment, Peanuts went on to become the most popular cartoon ever created.

Keillor likes to take people by the sculpture of Lucy because it is a reminder of what your hometown can do to you from time to time. Sometimes we miss something beautiful, something important and life changing, because it is so ordinary, so familiar.²

Prophets are not without honor, said Jesus, except in their own hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house. The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus because he was just a carpenter, with questionable family pedigree, and they found it offensive to imagine great power and wisdom from such a man.

It got me wondering, Why do people reject Jesus today?

Maybe in our world people fall prey to the same dynamic, that familiarity breeds contempt. Can it be possible that we can be so familiar with Jesus that we reject him? One would think that the more we

1 Mark 6:4

2 This story was taken from John Buchanan, "Let's Not Let Jesus Get Away from Us Again," July 16, 2006, www.fourthchurch.org

know Jesus, the more we should be attracted to him, but is that always the case? Aren't there times when we think we know Jesus all too well, and our familiarity with Jesus causes us to turn a deaf ear to him?

Sometimes we know Jesus well enough to know that he wouldn't approve of something. To some, Jesus can be a real party-pooper. You know him, don't you? He's that incessant whispering in our ear that tells that what we are about to do is wrong. He's the one who won't let us have "fun". You see, there comes a time when we know Jesus well enough to know that he wouldn't approve of something. And so we decide we'd rather not follow him.

Why do people reject Jesus today? Maybe it's because they've stopped caring about faith altogether. While I was preparing for this sermon, I came across a disturbing article written in 2003. It was an article about people's attitudes toward religion in general. In a discussion about atheists and agnostics and people who profess to be religious, the author defines a new category of people who broadly intersect all the other categories. He calls this class of people "apatheists". "Apatheism," he says, "is a disinclination to care all that much about one's own religion, and an even stronger disinclination to care about other people's [religion]."³ He further notes that many, if not most apatheists, are people who say they believe in God. The author pointed out that from 1972 to 2000, the proportion of people who say they never go to church tripled, reaching 33% of the general population in 2000. And lest we think ourselves somehow superior simply because we are in church today, the author also noted that "even regular churchgoers can, and often do, rank quite high on the apatheism scale. There are a lot of reasons to attend religious services: to connect with a culture or community, to socialize, to expose children to religion..."⁴ But none of those reasons necessarily mean you care about God.

I would imagine that one of the chief reasons people reject Jesus today is because they just don't care very much. Apatheism is alive and well in our world today.

But rejection of Jesus and his authority is not the only option we see in this morning's text. We do have another option, which is evident to us in the second story from this morning's text, where Jesus sends his disciples out with instructions to take nothing but the shirt on their back and the shoes on their feet. Clearly, the instructions are given to indicate that what is required is complete trust that God will provide. For the disciples to set out on the journey is an indication of their belief in Jesus and the proclamation of his power and his word.

What about you? Will you believe in Jesus? Will you accept Jesus' authority in your life? Are you willing to declare your complete trust that God will provide?

You see, belief is more than just recognizing that Jesus has the power to do miracles. Even the people of Nazareth saw that Jesus had the power to do miracles. Belief means accepting Jesus' authority in our lives, and it means that we will live our lives in a new way, a way defined by Jesus as he calls us to follow him. Belief means recognizing that it is in Jesus that God's kingdom comes to us, and belief means embracing the life Jesus calls us to live. Belief means that things will be different under Jesus.

The day was September 20, 1989. The place was the city of Pretoria, South Africa. On that day, F.W. de Klerk was inaugurated as President of South Africa.

On the day of his inauguration, de Klerk invited his favorite pastor, a white man named Peter Bingle, to lead a worship service in Pretoria. During the sermon, Pastor Bingle spoke, "Mr. de Klerk, as our new President, God is calling you to do his will. Today God calls you to serve as the President of South

3 Jonathan Rauch, "Let it Be," The Atlantic Monthly, May 2003, p. 34.

4 Ibid.

Africa. God's commission is not to serve as the President of some of the people, but as the President of all the people of South Africa."

By the benediction, de Klerk was weeping. He called his family and friends together and said, "Pray for me. God has told me what I must do. And if I do it, I will be rejected by my own people. Pray for me, that I might do the will of God." Soon thereafter, de Klerk took steps to release Nelson Mandela. Then he began to negotiate with the African National Congress. Then he worked to dismantle the system of apartheid. The rest, as they say, is history.⁵

You see, you cannot profess belief in Jesus and be unchanged. Belief in Jesus means walking in his ways and obeying his commands. But think of the possibilities that you unleash when you take that step of belief! The world will not be the same!

The call to you and me every day is the same: What will you do with Jesus? Either you'll accept him, or you'll reject him. Acceptance will mean living a new way of life; rejection will mean closing the door on his authority in your life.

What will you do with Jesus? I think today's scripture lesson is especially appropriate this morning, for it is a call to declare our allegiance to Jesus Christ, not only as our Savior, but also as our Lord. On this, the day after the celebration of our nation's independence, it is good that we ground our independence in the knowledge that in all things we depend on God. Can we turn the tide of apatheism, and once again become a nation that truly believes it when we say, "In God we trust"? As a nation that calls itself Christian, what will we do with Jesus?

May God bless America; but even more, let us pray that America will bless God.

Amen.

⁵ This story is taken from Susan Andrews, "Saved by Scandal", lectionary homiletics website (www.goodpreacher.com)