

JESUS IS NOT JUST 'ONE OF US': MARK 6:1-6

Good Morning!
Let us pray....

The "hometown," "home court" advantage is a very real occurrence in many areas of life.

Familiar fans and supportive surroundings
help us humans to perform better at many tasks,
from singing to sports.

But not in sermons.
There is very seldom
a home court advantage in preaching!

Family and close friends may inspire us
to make the game-winning shot,
or hit the highest note,
but when it comes to the intimate affair
of **preaching God's Word** -
of transcending the divide between
there & then and *here & now*,
making it clear how the words of Scripture should enlighten, encourage,
confront, and challenge us -
when it comes to preaching to family and friends,
it's **hard**.

Granted, it might be easier
to impress, to invigorate,
to lay on the rhetorical relish with
grandiose gestures,
dazzling diction,
and absolutely awesome alliteration.

But that's not **preaching**.
That's a **show**.

Preaching takes **guts**..
It takes **bravery** to do the necessary hard work
at the intersection between the *stuff of God*
and the *stuff of life*.

Because, if what we Christians believe is TRUE,
everything changes,
and a preacher's job is to make that clear.

However, when it comes to family and friends,
it's difficult to preach repentance to those who
 changed your diapers,
 calmed your tantrums,
 kept your secrets.

But every stressed out seminarian,
every nervous young pastor preparing
to preach to the home crowd,
can take heart that the very One we preach,
Jesus the Messiah,
faced a similar challenge during his earthly preaching ministry.

Please turn with me to the Gospel of Mark, beginning on page 836 of your pew Bibles.

To understand today's Gospel text from Mark 6,
we first need a bit of context
from Mark chapters 1 through 5.

Please follow along with me in your Bibles,
glancing at the pages as I summarize these chapters.

The biggest thing I'd like us to note is that
Jesus is on a roll.

Mark's Gospel takes off quickly
into the narrative of Jesus,
who,
after he is baptized by his forerunner John,
is affirmed of his identity by the very voice of God.

He is then driven yet sustained by the Spirit through the wilderness testings of Satan.

Jesus then returns from the wilderness
and begins his preaching ministry in Galilee –
boldly "proclaiming the gospel of God,
and saying "The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe in the gospel."

He then calls his first disciples,
who join him in his whirlwind ministry of
 preaching and teaching with authority,

healing the sick,
and casting out demons.

So much for chapter 1!

In chapter 2, he challenges Jewish conceptions about
the forgiveness of sins,
fasting,
and keeping Sabbath.

In chapter 3, we witness the first hints
of outright opposition to Jesus
on account of his unorthodox Sabbath practices,
yet this is immediately followed by a description
of Jesus' growing crowd of followers.

Unfazed, Jesus calls and appoints the twelve apostles. He challenges the experts in Jewish Law,
and scandalously stretches the boundaries of family.

In chapter 4, he teaches in parables,
before commanding and calming the wind and the sea.

In chapter 5, he upsets an entire region
by casting out a legion of demons.

And before we get to chapter 6,
he reverses death itself
for the sake of a synagogue official,
and reverses disease
for the sake of a woman with a discharge of blood.

In the face of FAITH,
Jesus tells the **dead** to get up.
He calls the physically,
financially,
and relationally destitute one "**daughter**."

Jesus is on a roll.
Jesus is up to something BIG,
something NEW.

He is bringing in the very kingdom of God, unexpectedly centered around HIMSELF,
and NOTHING, NO ONE - not winds,
not waves,
not Pharisees,
not scribes,

not disease,
not destitution,
not demons,
not even DEATH - can stand in his way.

Well, maybe *one* thing can.

We're now on page 841, Mark chapter 6 begins this way:

"He [Jesus] went away from there and came to his hometown [Nazareth], and his disciples followed him.

2 And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying,

"Where did this man get these things?

What is the wisdom given to him?

How are such mighty works done by his hands?

3 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."

Now, before I get to two negative aspects
of the Nazarenes' reaction,
let's consider two positives:

(1) First, in verse 2, **they are asking the right questions.**

They recognize that Jesus has

wisdom,

mighty works,

mighty hands –

things which should have reminded them
of God himself:

- The God who, according to Jeremiah (51:15), "made the earth by his **power**, who established the world by his **wisdom**, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens."
- The God who, according to Deuteronomy (4:34 and 7:19), rescued Israel from the house of slavery with a "mighty **hand** and an outstretched arm."
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Jesus' wisdom and mighty deeds
should have persuaded them
that God was up to something **big**, something **new**.

The Creator was re-creating.

The Redeemer was rescuing and restoring

-- like Jesus had just done with Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman in chapter 5.

(2) Second, in verse 3, **everything the hometown crowd says is factually correct!**

- Jesus was in fact a **carpenter** by family trade.
- And although it's perhaps a slur, or a reference to Joseph's prior death, Jesus is in fact the **"Son of Mary."**
- He did in fact have **siblings**.
- He was in fact from **Nazareth**.

So, what's wrong with the hometown reaction? Let me focus on two things:

(1) First, their reaction shows us that **you can ask the right questions with the wrong attitude.**

Sure, Jesus' wisdom and mighty deeds *should* have persuaded them that God was up to something **big**, something **new** – and that they might have to change their lives because of it.

But instead, they ask their questions with incredulous skepticism.

"Just who does Jesus think he is?

What right has he to say these things?

To act this way?

We know who he really is. We watched him grow up! He's just one of us, a normal Nazarene."

(2) Second, then, their reaction shows us that **you can know the facts and miss the point.**

In fact, sometimes,
you can use the facts in order to miss the point!
You can miss Truth with a capital "T"
by focusing on the lowercase.

That's what they're doing here.

The scandalized hometown crowd is bringing up the familiar, comfortable aspects of Jesus' existence to give themselves a way out from underneath Jesus' powerful claims on them and their future.

After all, they don't have to repent in light of the coming Kingdom of God if this "King Jesus," what with his preaching and working wonders like some kind of prophet, is really just the homeboy handyman who's out of his mind, right?

So, Jesus responds:

"A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household."

5 And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.

Citing a familiar proverb of the day
-- something close to "*familiarity breeds contempt*" --
Jesus steps into a long tradition of rejected prophets -- those sent by Yahweh to diagnose the sins of his people and point them back to covenant loyalty, but repeatedly rejected because of their intensely unpopular proclamations.

Hear the haunting words of 2 Chronicles 36(:15-16).
Commenting upon the faithlessness of Judah, it says:

"The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

16 But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy."

(...speaking of the Babylon exile)

Friends, **Jesus is the remedy!**
He is Yahweh's true Prophet!
He brings us back from exile.
He is the King in the Kingdom of God,
with dominion over demons, disease, and death!

And yet, in the face of stubborn unbelief at Nazareth, Mark is willing to say that Jesus was **UNABLE** to so a mighty work there.

Sure, he healed a few sick people,
but whereas elsewhere in the Gospels it is the crowds who marvel at the mighty words and works of Jesus,
here he himself is **STUNNED** by their unbelief!

Sisters, brothers: **You can know the facts, and miss the point.**
Because FACTS aren't FAITH.

FAITH is not merely intellectual assent to true propositions about Jesus.
Look back at Mark 5,
to Jairus and the bleeding woman!

Faith is about entrusting yourself, your entire life, to Jesus as your King - your only Hope, your only Lord.

When you hear "faith," think "faithfulness."

Think "trust."

Think "loyalty."

Faith is something absolutely necessary for a relationship to exist.
This is true with humans, and it's true with God.

Knowing the right things, having the Creed memorized backwards and front, is not the same as **life-changing loyalty to Jesus Christ**.

And, to be sure, faith cannot merely be produced
by sheer force of will.
We would be nothing but faithless
were it not for God's grace.

But faith does involve our *wills*, our entire *selves*.
It is something we *commit* to.
It is something that, by God's grace, we *participate* in.
And it is something that can be *rejected*.

Now, there are some in the world who would be perfectly comfortable to come right out say
"I reject and refuse Jesus as Lord."
Unbelief can take the form of outright opposition to Jesus. In the Gospels, we see this in those
who want Jesus dead.

But that's not the rejection Jesus receives here at Nazareth.
And, my guess is, that's not the refusal he receives from **me**, from **you**, either.

Because, see, we're prone to the subtler (and therefore greater) rejection of Jesus
by making him to "**just one of us**."

Now, don't misunderstand me.
Jesus was and is **fully human**.
He doesn't save us from a *distance*.
He dove from heaven's heights
into the muck and mire of our sin-stained existence
to bring us back to God.

But this salvation involves **repentance**.
It requires ***turning away***
from our faithless pursuit of Sin and Death.
And it requires the faithfulness of ***turning toward***
our faithful God.

Salvation does not require us getting back to God
on our own efforts or merit,
but it does entail complete and utter
dependence on and *allegiance to* Jesus as King.

But, as we've seen, we can escape total allegiance to King Jesus if he's "*just one of us Nazarenes.*"

Friends, King Jesus is not "just one of us"!

He has his own agenda of cosmic redemption.
He has his own approach,
which often appears upside-down to us,
because it involves repentance and self-sacrifice, because it includes suffering on a bloodstained Cross before the triumph of the Empty Tomb.

King Jesus is not "just one of us"!

So the uncomfortable question stands:
Are we loyal to King Jesus above all else?
Or are we loyal to a "Jesus"
we've made in our own image?

King Jesus is **not**
"middle-to-upper-class-American-Jesus."

Don't get me wrong,
he cares about the welfare of those around the world and those in this country more than we do.
His agenda surely has implications
for life here in the United States of America,
and it very well might require the hard work of
being faithful with many resources and possessions.

But, hear me:
**King Jesus doesn't just want to add a pearly gate
to our picket fences.**

He doesn't just want to stamp
a Jesus-approved ticket to heaven
on our pre-existent American Dream.

He wants us to crucify the American Dream!

He calls us to abandon
our self-centered agendas of upward mobility,
and instead to take up our crosses!
To adopt his others-focused agenda
of self-sacrificial love!

And just like it was
for Jesus' hometown crowd back then,
our easiest way out of this required repentance *now*
is to make Jesus' *message* a little less demanding
and his *mission* a little bit more like our own,
until finally, faithlessly –
though we may worship Jesus with our lips –
in our hearts, we worship only **ourselves**.

Briefly notice with me that, in Mark 6:7-13,
Jesus sends out his disciples to do
what *he himself* had been doing:
 preaching repentance,
 casting out demons,
 and healing the sick.

King Jesus' followers carry forward his mission.
Do we?

Will we, in faith,
entrust our entire lives in allegiance to him?
No matter the changes?
No matter the costs?
Will we refuse to make Jesus into "just one of us"?

King Jesus has dominion over
 disease,
 demons,

and death.

Does he have dominion over our **dreams** and **desires**?

By God's grace,
 given to us in the
 life,
 death,
 resurrection,
 and ascension of Jesus Christ our Lord,

By God's amazing grace,
may these things be so,
may we follow him faithfully.

Amen.