

14th Sunday Ordinary Time – Becoming the Gospel

Based on Ezekiel 2:2-5; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; and Mark 6:1-6

Israel – Nazareth and Capernaum

Two summers ago I traveled to Israel. I can clearly remember the day that we traveled to Nazareth passing Cana on the way up into the hill country. That afternoon we traveled to Capernaum about a 40-minute bus ride out of the hill country and down onto the lush green valley fed by the Sea of Galilee. We visited the village of Capernaum with its ancient ruins containing Peter's home on the shores of Galilee and a Synagogue, which dated back to the first century A.D. This was a synagogue that Jesus and Peter had likely preached in. The village ruins were within 100 yards of the synagogue giving one the sense that the community was very close-knit and small. The population was probably somewhere between 700 to 1000 inhabitants... not unlike our parish population for a Sunday Mass. To be rejected there, meant you were rejected by everyone!

Rejection

Being rejected is a painful experience. Whether it's trying out for a musical group, a part in a play, or a sports team; or being rejected by a potential employer, a college, or another person... rejection hurts. Perhaps it hurts the most, when it comes from those who have known us the longest or the best. Our readings today highlight the experiences of Ezekiel, Paul, and Jesus and their encounters with rejection. They all knew what rejection was like... And in the case of Jesus, rejection came from those who thought they knew him best.

Rejection, Suffering and God's Grace.

Much of Paul's suffering... was the result of facing constant opposition to his message... he experienced rejection often. He describes this suffering as a thorn. The Greek word used in this context is "skolops" which properly translates to a stake... an instrument of torture, which could inflict savage pain. For Paul this pain was intermittent and severe enough to bring Paul to his knees but never constant enough to keep him from fulfilling his mission. Paul begged the Lord in prayer for this pain to be taken from him. And God answers Paul's prayers in the way he answers many prayers... He does not take the pain away but gives Paul the strength to live with it. This is the way God works with everyone... He does not spare us things but gives us the strength to endure and conquer them. Paul refers to this

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strength and courage as the promise and reality of sufficient grace. And we see the evidence of this sufficient grace throughout Paul's life.

Jesus knew Rejection.

When Jesus comes to Nazareth he confronts a severe test. There is no tougher audience than those who have known him since childhood. His teaching was not greeted with wonder, but with scorn... "They took offense at him." His native people were scandalized that a man who came from a background such as His could say and do the things that he did. Like... preach with wisdom and heal the infirmed. Familiarity had bred a mistaken contempt. The people of Nazareth were so sure of who Jesus **was** that they could not see who he **had become**. Sometimes we can be too near a person to see their worth... their goodness... their holiness. It is important to remember that the accidents of birth, fortune, and pedigree have nothing to do with our potentiality and our worth as persons. And they certainly have nothing to do with our value in God's eyes... and the work he wants to do and can do in our lives.

The Dampening Effect of Attitude

The Gospel emphasizes the point that... Jesus "**could do no deed of power there!**" It is clear that the attitude of the people had a dampening effect on His work. It also marked the end of his time there... rather than stay with his people, Jesus moved on. He left home to find a more receptive audience. Does our attitude prevent Jesus from doing his best work here? In our Church, our homes, and our hearts? Are we a receptive audience to Jesus and what he has to offer us?

Faith and Openness to God's Power

Jesus inability to do mighty deeds in Nazareth speaks to the power of the relationship between faith and our own openness to God's power. The implication is that if the people had believed in him, Jesus could have done a great deal more. Expectancy and openness to the power of God have a great deal to do with how much grace can accomplish in our life. God wants to fill us with his grace... he wants us to do great and holy things with that power.

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Looking for Miracles

Perhaps the people of Nazareth felt that they knew Jesus and his family so well that they couldn't conceive that God could be at work through Him. Maybe they were looking for the exotic, or the extraordinary. Perhaps he was too ordinary to be an instrument of God's power. Relying on miracles and extraordinary events can cause us to miss the ways that God is present and at work in the simple and the common events of our daily life. Don't dismiss the ordinary... God speaks to us and works through people and things such as these!

Openness to the Value in Front of Us.

This past week we celebrated Independence Day and that brought to mind a story from 1989 of a collector who spent \$4 at a Pennsylvania flea market for a dismal painting because he liked the frame. With the purchase of that dismal painting He ended up possessing a copy of a first printing of the Declaration of Independence. The discovery was announced by David N. Redden, head of the book and manuscript department at Sotheby's in Manhattan who discovered the manuscript. The document discovered was an "unspeakably fresh copy" of the Declaration. It was found behind the painting when the collector took the frame apart. "The fact that it has been in the backing of the frame preserved it," Redden said. He related that the unidentified owner bought the painting, for its gilded and ornately carved frame. He described the painting as... "a dismal dark country scene with a signature he could not make out." He told Mr. Redden that he discarded the painting, which he disliked. And when he realized the frame was crudely made and unsalvageable, he got rid of it as well. That copy of the Declaration sold for millions of dollars. A reminder that we can easily look past or not recognize the value of what is in front of us!

Conclusion

Today's readings give us several things to think about... First, be open to God and His Son... Don't be so certain that you know God and his ways so well or that you know what he has in store for you. He has great things in mind... are you open to the greatness his sufficient grace will bring you to?

Be careful how you measure others, especially those you know well. Measure each person you meet anew... they may have changed. God may be at work in their lives, doing great things for them too.

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If you have experienced or are experiencing rejection do as Jesus does... move on. Go do something good for someone else, someplace else. Don't knock your head against a wall trying to move people who don't want to be moved. Jesus moved on several times and he allowed folks to walk away when they didn't, couldn't, or wouldn't get him.

Keep in mind that Jesus sent the disciples out to share the good news. They were to become the Gospel. We are called to be the Gospel in our time... your life is the best homily someone will ever hear. And how you live your life speaks to more people, more effectively every day than any preacher can on a Sunday. Joy and holiness are infectious... be the joy of the Gospel and count on God to do the rest.

Finally, remember that God's grace is sufficient for anything and everything he has asked us to do. It is this grace that allows us to not be concerned with what others think us to be... But rather confident in who God knows us to be!

May God Bless you and may he be at work in your life.