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Mark 6:1-13

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Let us Pray:

Lord between what is spoken and what is heard, let there be truth.

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Some weeks back I preached on Jesus' first homecoming in the 3rd chapter of the gospel of Mark and, like today's story, that first homecoming was pretty disappointing.

One could not help but hear, there in that first reunion, the resonances of John "He came to His own and His own knew Him not."

It begs a question of us, doesn't it?

When Jesus returns, will we know him? Will we recognize Him for what He is, or, like His family, will we wonder at the legitimacy of someone who seems so familiar to us but who we believe might be punching above their weight?

Or asked another way...

Will the messiah we have imagined, the messiah we are desperate to meet, the messiah we are so convinced we know, impeded us from ultimately accepting the messiah that is, even if that One is quite close to us?

I suppose this week's lesson is about rejection.

Who is doing the rejecting?

What is the Lord's response to it?

What should be ours?

In Mark 3 the rejection is quite active in that we are told that:

“When his family heard it — (all the fuss caused by Jesus' teaching and healings — they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”

Remember that this is right after Jesus has appointed the 12 and He is once again engaged with the “scribes from Jerusalem” which is to say those who ought to have known better.

The Lord's response to His family's rejection of Him at that first reunion is to effectively disown them.

“Who are my mother and my brothers?” He asks, and looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

That's pretty powerful stuff. It points at a radical restructuring of the way family works in the inbreaking reign of God.

But why, after such a disappointing family reunion on the first pass, does Jesus return home for more?

Maybe He is not quite ready to give up on mama Maria and His siblings... after all they surely will have heard now about all the awesome deeds of power he has been performing all over the countryside?

He commands the wind and the rain on the sea of Galilee, the weather recognizes His authority.

He casts out demons on the other side of Gennesaret who, immediately, upon simply looking at Him, cry out “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”

One can imagine that, even as He is walking up the road passing the “Welcome to Nazareth” sign, He is thinking in His head “if even the weather and the demons of hell recognize and obey me, surely the folks who saw me growing up will?

But instead...

“Isn’t that the carpenter’s kid?”

“Isn’t that Mary’s son?” A question which many who study scripture think is a sort of backhanded calling into question whether or not Joseph was really Jesus’ dad.

Where did He get all this...who does He think He is?

What is it about familiarity that breeds contempt?

Why is it so hard to see and accept God “making all things new” in someone we know?

Today’s gospel continues with the writer describing the fact that so deep was the incredulity and unbelief of the hometown crowd that they “took offense” at Him, which is to say “they were scandalized” by Him...which is also to say “they stumbled” over Him.

And that particular way of describing their reaction will be important for them... and for us later... because it will be ringing in our ears when we see Jesus for what He truly is at the end of the gospel.

When the hometown kid is taken into custody in Gethsemane, 4 chapters from here, when He is beaten and brutalized and rejected by everyone, even the 12 who themselves performed deeds of power in His very name!

When the simple carpenter’s son from Nazareth, this time not in His hometown but in Jerusalem, this time not as “Jesus the son of Mary,” hometown kid turned bigshot but rather Jesus, “king of the Jews,” and Son of the living God.

When the building block that was rejected by His own family, by His own people, by the whole of the world and ultimately even by us, whom He was saving even as we rejected Him...becomes the chief cornerstone of a heavenly family into which all of creation is being redeemed...well then, there will be no doubt about who Jesus is.

And we will all wonder then...how come we didn’t see it?

How could we have missed it??

Crestfallen and rejected in today’s gospel, the Lord’s response is not what we expect, it’s not the slinking off in defeat and depression or the railing at and cursing of our contemporaries that, if we are honest, might have characterized our own responses.

Jesus instead is renewed in His salvific mission. The 12 he called and appointed 3 chapters ago at the first disastrous hometown return, He now commissions and sends out.

He imputes in them, the same power by which He has been exorcising and healing and liberating.

He admonishes them to go out in faith, to seek hospitality and to preach the good news of forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

And this would have been sufficient I think, don't you?

But today's Gospel leaves us with this kicker:

"If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, then as you leave, shake even the dust from your feet as a testimony against them."

We can surely understand how Jesus might be frustrated, even fed up with those who have ears to hear but still will not.

But, shake the dust from your feet?!

That does not sound to me like the making of all things new.

That does not sound to me like the final position of the God who is redeeming all in all.

People of God, you will inevitably be frustrated by those, who simply will not come out of their prison cells into the light of the Living God who has freed them even with the door wide open.

Sure, shake the dust from your boots.

But know that God is capable of redeeming everything and that your message, the good news that you have been entrusted with, whether it is accepted or not, is ultimately that, in Jesus, God has already done it.

Amen.