

Mark 6:1-13

July 4, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

In his book, *What the Dog Saw and other adventures*; (2009, Little, Brown, and Company) Malcom Gladwell reminds us there was a time, mid-1980's, when only two main brands of spaghetti sauce were available for purchase: Ragu and Prego, with only one minor difference between the two. Prego was a little thicker in that they used diced tomatoes as opposed to Ragu's use of tomato puree. The sales and market share of Prego, a product of Campbell's Soup Company, was declining, and management was desperate for answers, so they hired Howard Moskowitz, a Harvard graduate who specialized in food-testing and market research.

At that time, conventional practice would have been to form a focus group of people and get their opinion on what they wanted in a spaghetti sauce. The problem with that, according to Moskowitz, was that consumers did not know what they liked if it did not yet exist. Because at the time the industry "had been striving for the platonic spaghetti sauce," which was "thin and blended because that's the way they thought it was done in Italy."

So, Moskowitz and Campbell's set about making a vast variety of spaghetti sauces each created to be uniquely different based on flavor profiles such as spiciness, sweetness, tartness, saltiness, thickness, aroma, mouth feel, cost, etc. They then took 45 sauces on the road to various markets and had small groups sample them. Upon charting the results, it was discovered consumers preferred a slightly different definition of what a perfect spaghetti sauce tasted like.

What Moskowitz discovered was a broad group of people preferred their sauce extra-chunky. This was important because at the time there was no category for extra-chunky spaghetti sauce and over the next decade that new category proved to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars to Prego.

Jesus may have been somewhat of a new category to the people of his hometown. He did not fit the way it had always been done, the way they thought it still should be as he returned home and taught with much knowledge and wisdom and they heard of the deeds of power that were being done by this one who was, "just a carpenter." He is supposed to stay in his lane. Follow the family trade. Doing otherwise would bring shame upon the family. So, what was the community to do but ask, "Who does he think he is?" Laugh at him. Dismiss him. Hinder their ability to experience in its fullest the kingdom of God Jesus was revealing, which is what seems to happen as Jesus was not able to do much of anything there, except heal a few sick people.

This aspect of the story is somewhat troubling as it seems to imply that we can stymie the work of Jesus. That his ability to heal, save, perform miracles depends upon us. Well, maybe it is

partly yes and an absolute no. Yes, in the fact spiritual blindness can indeed close humanity off to witnessing all that he is doing in the world and all that he can do in our lives. Distance us from Jesus. Hold us back from joining to his mission and the work he has called and authorized us to do, just as he does the disciples. Perhaps, he did not heal more at Nazareth because nobody brought to him the sick. No one led him to the hungry. No one spoke on behalf of the lame. Yet, make no doubt about the fact it is a definitive “no” because God will continue to be God. Jesus will continue to be Jesus. The Spirit will continue to blow where the Spirit chooses. God’s kingdom will continue to break in upon the world God so loves, with or without our efforts. With or without the ways we might get in the way or fail to see there are a variety of ways God meets people.

Today’s gospel lesson made me stop and wonder, where might we stymie the work Jesus has called us to? Where might we put blinders on our ability or someone’s else ability to see, hear, experience the love of Jesus, the inbreaking of the kingdom, the grace the church loves to dwell in. Because in our story today, it is those who should know him best that ultimately do not know him and sometimes the church fills this role as well. Perhaps, it is when Jesus does not fit into the box, we try to put him in. The box that says Jesus is all about playing nice, preaching about love, and being who we want him to be, teaching what we want him to teach, and saving those whom we think should be saved. We like that box, but we get a little on edge when Jesus steps out of that box and tells us to forgive time and time and time again. Or when he tells us to sell all we have or put him ahead of all else, even our beloved families. Or the fact we ought to look at ourselves first before we begin pointing the finger elsewhere. Or perhaps it is when Jesus steps outside of the box to extend the kingdom to others we would prefer not be in that nice little box we have created. Or, perhaps, it is when we are not open to new ways the Spirit may be at work among us? Perhaps its feeling defeated from past attempts to proclaim the good news, rejections met at the absurdity of the resurrection, stares and even resigning ourselves to the belief we will never grow so it is just easier to give up or place the burden upon someone else. Perhaps, it is the thought we, individually or communally, are not good enough for God to use us. Maybe, it is even someone closest to us that has put a stumbling block before our spiritual growth, our ability to carry out Jesus’ mission at hand, and our ability to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. To be his hands, feet, mouth, and presence in the world.

It is not that the work of God stops. It is not that Jesus is any less powerful, present, or able to accomplish God’s will in the world. It is simply our lenses may fail to comprehend it. Our senses dulled to experience it. Prior to this pandemic, there had been, over the years, talk about expanding and upgrading technology and entering the realm of the online community, but that is all it was ... talk. There was always something standing in the way ... money, questioning the need to do such a thing, it seemed too big a task to tackle, fear, etc. Looking back, I know I for one found the task too daunting and was fearful of having my sermons put out there for the world to hear. I can now look back and see doing so not only doubted God’s ability to create a new, but it also closed me off from experiencing the joy and love of newfound relationships

created through the ongoing work of the Spirit. While we may assign any number of negative adjectives to this pandemic, God has revealed yet again God's ability to create good from the muck and mire of life. No longer could excuses be made. There was no time for talk. To live and continue to carry out our mission we had to act. Take a leap. Trust in God to provide, lead and use what little we may have thought we had. And true to God's word, that is what happened, he used us and now we are blessed to be connected to a much broader community of the people of God. Sisters and brothers in Christ we may never have known. What if we clung to the box that said worship must be done in-person, in a certain way or specific place, or last for a specific amount of time? Thank goodness the Spirit led us to step beyond that box and experience more fully the kingdom of God Jesus came to usher in!

Thank goodness God continued to use us, the body of Christ, even despite those moments we become stuck in our ways, stubborn, apathetic, struggle to understand Jesus, or whatever it may be. Because that is exactly what God does. He calls the 12 to him and then he sends them out. Jesus gives them authority and a mission. Even despite what we have witnessed earlier in Mark's gospel.

- When they do not understand.
 - 4:13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? (i.e., parable of the Sower) Then how will you understand all the parables?"
- Their lack of faith, trust in Jesus?
 - 4:38 "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 40 He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (The calming of the storm on the sea)
- Their failure to see and know Jesus.
 - 5:31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" (The healing of the hemorrhaging woman in last week's text)
- Their doubt in Jesus to provide for their needs and those of others and their ability to carry out the work Jesus has called them to do.
 - 6:35 When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" (Feeding of the multitudes)

The good news is despite all of this and despite all the ways we might react in similar ways, Jesus continues to call. He continues to teach. He continues to give us authority. He continues to send. He continues to say, "*You* are the equipment." We need not ever think we are not good enough, do not have the proper gifts or there is someone better. Yes, I know I am reading

from *The Message* translation in which the translator and author, Eugene Peterson, has perhaps adlibbed a bit, but as Jesus sends the disciples out and as he sends us out, is that not what he is saying. “*You* are the equipment.” You are good enough because I called you. I have taught you. I have appointed and commissioned you for service. I have loved you. I have saved you. I have fed you. I have led you. You are mine. You are loved. *You* are my equipment. When someone tells you otherwise or will not listen to the good news you proclaim. When someone will not welcome you or believe in me, do not sweat it. Just be on your way. Try, try, and try again. Because that is what Jesus seems to have done in his hometown and he is our lead. He is the grounding for all we do. He is the light that leads our way. Go! Be! You are Christ’s equipment! Amen.