

**2 Corinthians 12: 2-10**  
**Mark 6:1-13**  
**July 8, 2013**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**

In today's gospel lesson we are given a remarkable contrast. Jesus is unable to perform miracles in Nazareth because of the lack of faith of the residents of his home town. Just a few verses later Jesus sends out his disciples and we are told, "...they drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."

The master is powerless and the servants are powerful! How can this be?

According to Mark, it was not that Jesus was powerless to perform miracles; rather the case seems to be that the residents were not open to recognizing Jesus' power. They could not see beyond the child who had hidden behind Mary and Joseph's robes and played in the streets of Nazareth with his sisters and brothers, who had told on a playmate who had stolen a pomegranate from the public market, and who had grown up to be a carpenter like his father. Who was Jesus to claim to be more than an ordinary human being! He leaves Nazareth to go to the big city of Tiberius and returns with big ideas and an inflated belief in his abilities. In short, to borrow from the apostle Paul, they saw Jesus from a human point of view.

What is this "human point of view?" By nature we rely on what we can see, touch, hear, and taste. Beyond this we trust on the accumulated lessons of experience. Based on our experiences we develop expectations of people and situations. Based on our experiences we anticipate what will happen next based on what has happened before. If we have been fortunate and in general we have had positive experiences of people and situations, we are more likely to respond positively and openly to life. When there are disappointments and tragedy, we are more likely to be resilient and expect to move through hard times to get to better ones.

On the other side, if we have had tragedy early in life, if we have suffered abuse, neglect, misunderstanding; if people have belittled our abilities or withheld love and approval, we will often expect life to give us more of the same. Our initial response to people and situations will often be one of anxiety. We will prepare ourselves to defend against expected hostility and rejection. As result we see life as dangerous and people as threats from whom we must protect ourselves.

Sadly, it is this “human point of view” which so often prevents us from trusting people who genuinely want to and can help us. We encounter a person or situation and we think, “Uh oh, I’ve met people like this before.” Or we think, “Uh oh, nothing good can come from this situation.” This response is so habitual that it happens often without our consciously thinking a single thought. This often occurs with people we have encountered before. We anticipate what meeting with a certain person based on our prior experiences. So, for some of you, the thought having lunch with me is the source of pleasure. For others of you-I hope, not many- the same thought is filled with dread.

At the risk of boring you to tears, let me observe one more thing. It is important so please stay with me. Very often our reactions to individual people have little or nothing to do with the people themselves. Instead, a person’s looks, mannerisms, speech, opinions, where they live, what they do, how they relate to their children, what car they drive remind us of similar experiences of people with similar traits. You may dread going to lunch with your pastor *not* because he is an ogre. Instead it may be that the last time, maybe twenty years ago, the pastor told you that your child’s struggles were your fault, or that the tragic death of a loved one was “God’s will” or he made inappropriate remarks about your looks. It may be that no pastor has

done any such thing. You simply expect that when someone gets near to you he or she will discover what a lame excuse for a human being you are.

No wonder that Jesus could do no miracles in Nazareth! And no wonder Jesus feels such sadness and frustration! The people he most wants to bestow God's blessings upon are unable to receive the gifts because they cannot see beyond Jesus' mere humanity! How he yearns to share God's amazing love and joy with the community who raised him! And yet his very familiarity to them and with them is an insurmountable barrier.

Meanwhile, Jesus' disciples, unburdened by familiarity and the limiting force of accumulated prior experience, and empowered with their own simple trust in Jesus and God's power working in and through him, are able to accomplish miracles in his name.

So, what might we learn from this?

I propose that we are all in one way or another, the people of Nazareth. Like them, we are not bad people who are just too ignorant or prejudiced to see Jesus for who he is and to receive his ministry. We simply see Jesus from a human point of view. Actually it would be more accurate to say that we see Jesus from human *points* of view. As we gather this morning, each of us has a different view of Jesus. Each of us has a different experience of seeking and following Jesus. Indeed, I propose that each of us sees Jesus differently in different situations. In times of joy he is the source of blessing. In times of sorrow he is a source of comfort. Sometimes we experience him judging us. Sometimes he seems just plain absent. In many ways how we experience Jesus is colored by our experience of life. Often we experience Jesus through encountering people who call themselves Christians, whether in person or as presented in the media.

My point is this: it is a mistake to believe that our experience of Jesus, whether directly or through other Christians, is identical with the real Jesus. Jesus is the fullness of God revealed in human flesh. He cannot be put in the box of our experience, or in the box of scripture or the box of doctrines about him. These are guides to Jesus. They are not Jesus. We stop growing spiritually when we believe in the Jesus of our understanding. There will always be more of Jesus than we will ever understand on this side of life. And what a wonderful thing that is! To follow Jesus is always to be on a journey of discovery and wonder! Following Jesus reveals new visions of the world, of our fellow human beings and of ourselves. Following Jesus we are freed from the power of our past experiences and can be to see people and situations in brand new ways. Indeed, with the apostle Paul, we not only stop seeing Jesus from an exclusively human point of view, we begin to view to view on another and ourselves from God's point of view. We begin to understand that God sees us and every human being through the eyes of Jesus. And Jesus sees you and me and all people as unique and beautiful creations of his heavenly father. He yearns for us to trust him and to receive the gifts of mercy, grace and unconditional love which he alone can give.

All he asks of us is to take the smallest step of faith and to ask him for the grace to trust him with our lives. He will supply what we ask. And we will experience a release and peace that no amount of worldly striving can give. And we will find ourselves offering and being vehicles of his healing. Amen.