

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: WEEK 6

Galilee: "The Mission of the Twelve" Mark 6:1-29

Commentary: "No Profit in being a Prophet...."

I know that he didn't mean it this way. I know that he was celebrating my journey – and, trust me, he wanted to celebrate because he, of all people, knew how long, twisted, and distracted my journey had been. I also know that he was proud of me. I know all of this – and more; but the message of his gift was clear: I was never going to be a prophet in my home Church.

The gift was a hand-drawn image of me, with bucket in hand, climbing into the pulpit of Rosedale Presbyterian Church – the Church that we attended as a family; where I grew up, ran around as an active, slightly unruly boy, where – while chasing Kathy Keith – I slipped on the ice on the front walk and badly broke my two front teeth, where I rebelliously stated that the 'youth group wasn't for the adults to get the kids to do work around the Church,' where, lately – as a now married, unemployed, seminary student, with a newborn son – had worked for three years as the Church caretaker (the official title was 'Custodian' but the Job description meant that I, out of sight and out of mind, cleaned the Church – came with the title – "From cleaning toilets to the pulpit.") I know that he didn't mean it this way, but my father's gift (one that I still have) revealed to me the truth: I would never be a Prophet in my home Church.

I'm not saying this to be unkind; but it is the truth – and is a truism about how well we are accepted by the people in our lives (the people we grew up with, played with, went to school with, even flirted and dated with), if we "grow up," "change," "seem different," than their perception of us as we were when the 'knew' us as a baby, toddler, child, gangly teenager, awkward suitor. First impressions – especially impressions made of us when we were young, before we 'grew into ourselves' – have a long lifetime, especially with Aunts and Uncles, teachers, and school bullies. We grow up – grow into ourselves – and become who we are and were meant to be, but those 'first impressions' didn't: to the people who "knew us when," in their minds, we didn't change – and, if we did (or didn't adhere to their perception of you) they don't like it.

How many of us have gone to a high school reunion – or an anniversary event of any kind – and run into people who you haven't seen in years/decades – and have heard "you've changed!" or "I didn't think that ..."? How many said similar things of others at the same events? It's almost as if we get validation or satisfaction from seeing the people we didn't 'think highly of' not succeed; and get grumpy – or even jealous – when they didn't stay as we had fixed them in our estimations, became successful, and made a name for themselves. This has happened to me and, in our reading today, happened to Jesus when He returned to his hometown – and Church!

The Mark account of Jesus' homecoming doesn't provide the added details of the Matthew and, particularly, Luke Gospels, but the message is still pretty clear: Jesus' old friends and acquaintances didn't know – or accept – this 'new,' 'adult,' 'authoritative, powerful' Jesus. He didn't fit their preconceived perceptions of Him: The carpenter's son; Mary's son; the son who left His widowed mother to go and become a bigshot in Capernaum; He wasn't the person they 'knew' or 'thought he was,' and they were not happy. [More than one commentator on this passage implied that these, seemingly innocuous, comments were actually the thinly veiled aspersions that get said during the coffee fellowship after a Church service. They amount to nothing more than accusations about His father status, mother's promiscuity, His actual lineage – all said with a smile while hold a cup of tea.] This Jesus wasn't 'their Jesus' – a point made clearer by their disappointment over Jesus' 'failure' to do any favours for them – and Jesus knew it; in fact, He expected it.

But, it was ok; He didn't do it to please them. Their rejection of Him revealed the pettiness of human nature but also served to galvanize Him in His ministry: from this encounter Jesus steps up His mission and assumes the mantle of 'prophet' that His cousin John the Baptist had worn. It is the turning point of Mark's Gospel – and Jesus' life.

After finishing a funeral service for a good friend, that turned into an unofficial 25th High School reunion (held at my friends tennis club, with drinks and nibbles), a woman who, as a teenager, never had time for me, came up and said: "I don't know what you do for a living, but you should be a minister." I told her that I was and the look on her face changed as she left realizing that she didn't know what to say. I had changed, she hadn't: but I was ok with it – I didn't do it for her.