

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House
Sunday, July 8, 2012

Sermon Notes¹

“A statement of faith, not a question of obedience”

Based on Mark 6:1-13

Audio on file: www.soundcloud.rbagnuolo
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And they took offense at him.

Or her.

Here's Jesus coming home after a road trip.

But we could identify this sort of story with anyone. Anyone coming home after being gone a while, maybe having accomplished good things in their time away, growing in voice and heart, filled with passion and sense of promise – and then coming home, excited, jubilant, even – only to find things are the same as when you left, people remember who you were, not who you have become, they refuse to see you differently, maybe fear it might reflect how much they have not changed: or maybe because they don't want to give up their sense of control, power, authority, or status within the group or community – “you left.”

So they say things like:

“who is this” or

“who does he think he is” or

“who does she think she is.”

“What kind of nonsense is this. I remember you...I know which side of the tracks you came from!”

What they really might be saying is, “Pay homage to us, follow the rules and pay your dues, and when it is ***your time*** we'll let you know and then maybe – maybe we'll let you

¹ Sermon Notes: Mostly edited; not totally; space left for the Spirit

in. **Then**, and only then, then you will be one of us and we will give you authority over those to whom you wish to teach. In the meantime, who do you think you are?"

We do things like this all the time, don't we?

For example, when I decided I wanted to teach, I had to go back to school at age 37, earn my 44 credit masters in education, do student teaching, be examined by the state, interviewed, hired on a probationary basis for three years and then became a permanently tenured teacher. I did that twice.

And I'm not saying that's wrong – not for teaching kids. But maybe it shouldn't apply to everything.

And then I decided to follow what I believed to be a call to ministry. Back to school at fifty. This time a 90 credit masters of divinity, a committee on ministry to guide and support me, a church community under whose care I was assigned, a supervised ministry program, a clinical pastoral assignment in a hospital – all this as training, and then an examination before the presbytery...and **then** at age 55 being ordained and called to the first church I would serve as an interim – sort of a "test" pastor.

Again, it's good to be prepared, developed, and matured – but I, maybe like you, seek a place to bring myself, not just my credentials. To set aside the degrees and the th achievements, and bring all of me to something important to me. That's why I am here.

And, maybe Jesus felt something like that...but even more. That no human power was going to interfere with what his Abba was calling him to do, filling him with the power to do.

But most of his home town didn't see the Spirit of God when he returned.

In fact, Jesus' cool reception was such that folks couldn't listen to him, to the burning he might otherwise have caused in their hearts – and except for the very few, they dismissed him – this carpenter's son – as arrogant and probably a little daft. And, I am sure they ridiculed around the tables and gathering places with derision, dismissal, and more.

For even more was brewing, as we know...

We know, too, that Jesus was human. We know he loved, wept, was pleased at times, became angry at times, and was lifted up by the crowds, as much as he lifted them.

So Jesus was coming home with what he hoped would be witness to others for the message he had to share, as it had been in his missionary trips. Mark tells us of the many things he had done since he left Nazareth. In earlier chapters, he establishes Jesus' authority in his baptism and the descent of the spirit and the heavenly voice upon him in Chapter 1; In chapter two he describes Jesus' teachings about the Kindom of Heaven, the

miracles he performed, such as the exorcism at Capernaum, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law; a "healing tour" throughout Galilee; including the leper being cleansed.

And he dealt with controversy and opposition from the temple leadership rebuking him for healing on the Sabbath, to rumors that he must be working with Beelzebub to do and teach what he is doing.

And then more stories, which surely would have circled of his calming of the seas, healing a demoniac, as well as lifting from her death bed Jairus' daughter from last week's reading.

However long he was gone, this now seasoned itinerant preacher, this rabbi, this Son of God returns home, after all he has been through, and is rejected.

Who is this?

By what authority (which licensing agency!) does he operate.

What a fraud! We know who you really are, Jesus!

Really?

Really.

I'm sure he was saddened, but he didn't give up, as we know. He took his disciples aside and said, "never mind about this." And he sent them out in to the villages and towns teaching and healing. And he told them that when someone doesn't welcome you or the Spirit, let it go. Don't hold on. Shake the sand from your sandals and move on to the next. And the next few chapters of Mark are full of Jesus and his disciples' healings and miracles, which included feeding the 5000, walking on water; healing the blind; his transfiguration and many, many teachings...

Along the way, and before he arrived in Nazareth, there were good numbers of people who took offense at Jesus – and those who will take the greatest of offense at him in his crucifixion. But he did not allow these "offense" of others toward him to stop him, to inhibit his love of God and others, and his mission, ministry, teaching, whatever you might want to call it – he didn't let these things stop him. I have to believe, though, every now and then – he must have felt like it. But he didn't.

I'm just sayin'

As you know, last week our denomination gathered in Pittsburgh for its General Assembly, an occurrence which takes place every two years. You received an insert prepared by The Outlook in this morning's bulletin, to fill you in a bit.

With others, my work was on the marriage committee, the committee that was considering a change in our constitution for marriage equality for same gender couples and/or a change that would give ministers permission to marry same gender couples in states where that is legal.

At Jan Hus, we have long-blessed, married, and celebrated same gender couples – well before my time. In fact, we are not alone in this and many ministers and churches are “coming out,” so to speak, very publically to raise what we believe to be the truth: that officiating in such celebrations is being faithful to our ordination vows and the church. Not the other way around. And from certain corners the response has been not unlike the response Jesus encountered among his own home community:

Who are these people and who gives them the authority to do such things.

Well, the same authority Jesus drew upon.

But one can easily remember those who fought the fight for justice before the changes were made. They are the believers, the advocates, those willing to sacrifice, speak for others who have no voice, place themselves in jeopardy – and go out together into the communities, not allowing those who greet them with cool receptions – stop them from continuing forward.

In many ways, although we did not pass any new amendments for ratification, we came together in enormous ways, with clear indications that we are a short distance from overcoming the coolness of objections with the warmth of our love, fired by the teachings and example of Jesus. And. There is afoot a movement now of ministers and pastors who will marry same gender couples in states where they are legal. Not out of defiance, but out of faithfulness.

In this way, the question, “Who gives them the authority to do such things?” is no longer a question of disobedience but a statement of faith.

Thank you all at Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and all the other churches in this denomination who for years have held fast that justice and love knows no bounds.

Let us continue to say so and practice such justice and love so they many know that we are, indeed, Christians – by our love, by our love...

And, yes, some will take offense to that...pray for them, please.

Amen