

Worship Service for July 4th: 6th Sunday after Pentecost

- **Old Testament:** 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10
- **New Testament:** Mark 6:1-13
- **Psalms:** Psalm 48

Announcements:

- Tuesday, July 6th: Session meeting for St. George's, RJ.
- Wednesday, July 14th: Session meeting for St. David's, TR.

Sermon Title: Honouring God's Servants!

So far in our previous passages we have heard of Jesus being followed by great crowds as he ministered to people. They followed him because of the great miracles, signs and wonders that he performed. And those who believed in him received life-changing encounters. After ministering in other places, he decides to go to his hometown and while there he preaches in the synagogues. We are told that the people "are amazed" and begin to ask questions.

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Isn't it interesting that other people were amazed at Jesus' wisdom and followed him everywhere and came to him for help, yet his own people took offense at him? Last week we even heard of Jairus, a synagogue official, who worked people who resented Jesus the most, yet he came and fell at Jesus' feet, asking him to help his daughter who was very sick. But other people who recognize Jesus' wisdom take offense at him.

One commentary states that the amazement of the people in Jesus' hometown was not the kind which the others had. It was not the kind where people are experiencing a sense of awe and wonder in a delightful way. This was another Greek word called "*ekplessō*" in which the people though amazed were thinking to themselves that there must be something shady going on here. Just like the pharisees who claimed that Jesus chased out demons through the spirit of Beelzebul. This felt suspicious that there was some kind of dark practice going on that they couldn't place their hands on. They were sure that there was something evil about this display of wisdom and power.

And it showed clearly in their expressions, “isn’t this Mary’s son; isn’t this the carpenter?” In Jesus’ day to identify someone by their mother instead of their father was a sign that that person’s legitimacy was being questioned. When these people addressed Jesus as Mary’s son and not Joseph’s son, they were belittling him and saying that “isn’t this the illegitimate son of Mary?”

Also, addressing him as the carpenter was as if to say “what business does he have preaching in the synagogue with such wisdom and power when he is neither a pharisee nor a scribe? Who does he think he is to talk to us in this way? Instead of appreciating a carpenter turned preacher who was doing a good job, they decided to take offense at him. Where others saw Jesus as an inspiration and a source of hope and deliverance, they saw him as a stumbling block.

What is our attitude towards God’s servants? Do we look at them as a threat or as church leaders? People have all different interesting reasons why they would look down on a minister. It’s either the gender, or the race or the fact that they are not one of their own or the fact that they are one of their own as in the case of Jesus; or just the kind of unfounded suspicion that they have.

There are times when people would be going through things that require them to see a minister for counseling and prayer. But no, I can’t see them because I don’t trust them; I just don’t like them; they are too young or too old and wouldn’t understand; they don’t have any experience they are just straight out of College or been out of school for way too long; they are not married or are married and would not understand my problems etcetera.

We are told in the passage that Jesus could not do any miracles in his own hometown except to heal a few people here and there because of their attitude. When you encounter situations like this as a minister there is nothing much you can do, and it puts you in a very difficult situation. Whatever you do at this point only deepens the suspicion and anger of those who have such negative attitudes towards you.

As a minister it is difficult to do anything good when you are dealing with such negativity. If you try to be extra nice it will still offend those who choose to be offended and if you decide to ignore their negativity, you will be considered as arrogant and rude. Perform miracles and you are trying to show off and if you don’t perform miracles, you are too full of yourself.

In a twist of events however we see that Jesus turns around and does even greater things. It is in this very chapter of the Bible that he feeds five thousand people and walks upon the water. And not only that, he also expanded his mission by sending out his disciples two by two and giving them power and authority to drive out demons and to heal the sick.

However, he thought them one very important lesson; *“whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”* Shaking the dust off one’s feet was a Jewish practice done each time they returned home from a Gentile town. And Jesus used this as advice for the disciples if they were rejected anywhere. There is no need dwelling in a place where you are not welcomed. Even though it was Jesus’ hometown, he had to leave because he was not welcomed by his people.

After persevering for a while, the people we take for granted might leave us some day and we will definitely regret if those people were truly sent by God and led by the Holy Spirit. Imagine when Jesus died and the people in his hometown finally realized that he was truly the Son of God.

Ministers of God are not perfect, but they are mostly sent by God. How many times apart from criticizing them have we taken time to pray for them? How many times have we treated them with the same kindness, respect and honour that we require from them? They are humans with feelings too. Treat them the way you would want someone else to treat you or your loved ones. Remember the Bible says to treat others the very same way we want others to treat us.

It is time for us to search our hearts honestly and be truthful of where we fall in this story. Are we like the people who followed Jesus because they were delighted in his ministry, or we are among those who resent him and take offence against him because of his ministry? And if you are offended by such a teaching, it is time for you to prayerfully ask yourself why. Wherever we find ourselves, let us pray for God to help us to develop the right attitudes towards His servants.

The more people tried to put Jesus down and hinder his ministry, the more followers he gained and is still gaining today, two thousand years later. The more they tried to fight against him and tell all kinds of lies about him, the more the Holy

Spirit responded by sending out more workers to do even more miracles, signs and wonders and the more they taught in his name, encouraging people to repent and be saved.

May God help us as His children to recognise when He sends His servants to us and may we be able to recognise the Holy Spirit at work in those people. Or else we might end up rejecting those whom God has sent to inspire, help us and bring hope into our lives and communities. May God help us to stop judging appearances and discern the Spirit of God at work in His servants. And may we also receive the grace to pray for our ministers that they will stay in the leading of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You reached out to so many different people, with so many different needs, in so many different situations. We thank you for the ways you have reached out to us, in the embrace of prayer, in the energy of a song, in thought sparked by a sermon, and in the wisdom of a word from scripture or the words of a friend. Sometimes your healing has brought comfort; sometimes it has brought challenge and the call to respond. Hear us as we seek your comfort and your challenge for the world, for the church and for our lives.

Bring comfort to those whose lives have been overturned by the pandemic: to those whose work or study has become so much more difficult; to those who cannot find work and don't know where to turn; to those who still struggle with COVID-19 or another lingering illness, and those who have lost hope that things will ever improve.

Bring challenge to those who lead recovery efforts over the next months: to those whose decisions affect the well-being of the vulnerable, to those who guide economic and educational planning, and those who are rebuilding community life. May your wisdom and compassion guide them.

Lord Jesus, bring comfort to those who are lonely or shut in, and to all who have lost beloved family members or friends during the pandemic; bring comfort to those who feel pain without relief and those who wait for diagnosis or life-restoring treatment. Offer peace to those who know there is no treatment and wait in hope for your eternal welcome.

Bring challenge to those who want to make the world a better place, and to all who work within science, medicine, and the law to improve the quality of life for all people. Give them a vision of their work that is both just and courageous, so that no part of society is neglected or mistreated or misjudged. Challenge those who stir up violence and unrest with a sense of shame for the cost to innocent lives, and with a deeper understanding of what justice means.

God of all, we know you sent us out to do your work, to face rejection, to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God, to have people turn their backs on us, to be your prophets, to be laughed at, to heal the sick, to be dismissed, to travel light, sometimes broke and sometimes penniless, and sometimes rich and wealthy.

We are reminded to shake the dust off of our shoes when we are not welcome and not listened to. We are reminded that in our weakness you are strong. We are reminded that in all of this Jesus, too, was rejected and a scandal to many.

Lord, today some of us today some of step into pulpits as your prophets in places where we have been treated less than kind, and sometimes outright rejected. Lord, pour your healing salve into the wounds we carry. Today, some of us are so wounded from the attacks that it is hard to lift our feet to shake the dust off our shoes. Pour your healing grace over us that makes Christ's power perfect in our weakness. Today, some of us feel like total failures or like giving up. Pour your steadfast love into us that we may see ourselves as you see us, and not give up as you yourself did not give up

God of gods and King of kings; you called and anointed David, you called and blessed Paul, and through your Son Jesus, you called the twelve to follow. In our time you have called us. Enable us to trust you above all voices, beyond all of our prejudices and fears. Give us courage to follow and serve you among all of our neighbours and with one another in the body of Christ. God of the Kingdom, hear our prayer. Give us courage to step out in faith, to go where you send us without hesitation or fear, trusting that Your presence goes with us, and that You will provide all that we need.

Lord Jesus, comfort your church in places where ministries struggle, whatever the reason. And challenge your church to renew our vision for ministry so that our witness is faithful to your all-embracing love, expressed not only in words but also

in the actions we take to embrace those who differ from us and yet have a place in your heart and your eternal care. Hear us now as we pray in the words you taught us, Lord Jesus, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Go now, and wherever people will hear you, proclaim the life-changing love of God. Do not fear your weakness, for when you are weakest, Christ's strength is known. Travel lightly, live simply, and honour those who welcome the gospel.

And may God be your protection and safe haven; May the power of Christ Jesus dwell in you; and may the Holy Spirit be your peaceful guide now and forever. Amen.