



## July 8, 2018 - Faith's Miracles

*Mark 6:1-13*

Given by Rev. Mattei

**What** is going on?

- Jesus is rejected by the authorities and by his relatives (a bitter recollection of his family's embarrassment and lack of acceptance of his behavior and message (Mk 3:21-31); do his disciples reject him, too? Not only strangers but also those who were intimate with him were not receptive of his message. He is hardly the first prophet to be rejected (see Ezekiel 2:1-5) and will not be the last one (even in our times God has sent prophets to denounce evil and proclaim freedom like pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, bishop Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day, bishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Cornel West, and many others.) His prophetic life tore down walls of division, spoke truth to the powerful and embraced the downtrodden. Is his prophecy expressed in his lifestyle offending us also (Mk 6:3; 14:27-29)?
- People's acknowledgment of Jesus' astounding wisdom and deeds of power is counterbalanced by the disappointing display of their lack of faith: great things per se do not change people; it's people's openness and receptivity (faith) that change people. Those who claim to know him in the flesh (knowledge by human standards: see 2 Cor 5:16) lack the illumination of the faith demonstrated by Jairus and the hemorrhagic woman (Mk 5:22.25). It's not enough to know *about* Christ: one is called to so know Christ to be of the same mind (Phil 2:5). What seems to be missing is the ability to observe and listen, to ponder deeply and to engage in (faith) conversation (Mk 4:12): how do we move from a superficial conversation to a deeper exchange? How do we receive the other person in a way that our faith is practiced and manifested? Can we display the glory of God the same way a simple Jewish carpenter did? What does it mean to live by faith (i.e. to trust in his presence, to obey his commands, to allow the anointing of his Spirit, to embody the vision of hope and to live out the divinely affirmed identity that we are all children of God) when we engage with another person? In other words, we worship God and give him glory, but do we trust the power of God in us and the call to incarnate his glory for all to see? Does our worship have any practical application?

- Jesus sends his disciples, two by two (so one may more easily avoid temptation, despair or even self-delusion), with clear authority over unclean spirits (one's own and other people's; see vv. 7.13) in order to anoint and to heal (v. 14) and with orders to trust only on God's providence, to accept vulnerability (1 Cor 2:1-5 and especially the "weakness" of 2 Corinthians 12:2-10) and to embrace simplicity of life by renouncing the world's securities and depend on others as both strategy and message.

**So what** does this mean for us?

It was easy to agree with 31 thousand people at the National Youth Gathering where songs, Bible studies and testimonials encouraged the youth to follow the call of the Lord, find their voice and express their truth. The youth found inspiration to be open to the prompting of the Spirit and be accepting and hospitable towards all. They explored what it means to be generous and altruistic and share their life in service to others, especially advocating for the rejects of society.

It should be easy to agree with church members. After all we all intend to be Christocentric and share in the very faith, hope and love of Christ: we claim to love others as we are loved and proclaim to be following in Jesus' footsteps. But polarizing divisions are evident in church life also. How can this be? Is it possible that we have embraced party lines and are incapable of seeing and speaking the truth with love (Ephesians 4:15)? Can we still be prophets of God to one another for the sake of the world? Should our Christianity be demonstrated in practical ways more than just being spoken of? But whose Christianity? The one of those bombing abortion clinics? Or of those engulfed in racist beliefs and behavior? Or even of those who espouse white supremacy, ethnic nationalism, militarism and religious superiority?

As a teenager I was locked into the self-defeating thought that if I did not sound smart and articulated people wouldn't agree with me and then they wouldn't like me. If people didn't like me, was I going to be loved, accepted and wanted, or was I merely tolerated? That was extremely scary, embarrassing and lonely. Every now and then I still think that if I don't win the popular vote I am not lovable. I need to see that thought crossing my mind and remind myself that I am already a loved and chosen child of God. Maybe we are victims of the same dynamics both in the Church and in society.

When I listen to current social conversations I feel scared and concerned. We seem locked into defensive posturing with the aim of upping one another where one says: "You've done this." and the other replies: "Yes, but you have done that!" We *can* move beyond finger pointing and Christians should lead the way. It does not mean that all should become conservatives or liberals. That is the world's way: win over or at the best

find the middle ground. We can learn to slow down and really listen to one another and consider how what is being said might be true instead of racing to think of a more forceful reply. We can breath and remind ourselves Whose we are and that we are in the presence of another child of God for whom Jesus has also given his life. And if it is too hard to do that we can at least remind ourselves that we are beloved of God and want to behave in a manner worthy of the name Christian.

***Than what*** can we do?

I invite you to write the closing to my sermon. Let us practice vulnerability and dependence on others' acceptance and kindness. I would like for you to stand and walk through the aisle. Tell to at least five people (it works even better if you know the two of you truly are of different political take): "You are a beloved child of God and even if we disagree on things I trust the power of God in you to save and to transform us." Our church is a safe environment to experiment with this idea and yet you may find this particular exercise hard to do. But in the encounter with the other we have the opportunity to incarnate the mercy, compassion and glory of God. If you want to see the glory of God, be Jesus to the other. In Jesus any human standard is suspended and overcome: we live by faith. Miracles may happen only when faith is present. Living by the Word we show Jesus (that is, Salvation) to one another; we have an opportunity to dispel demons and bring healing to the world. Let God take over and then remember: we are called by God, equipped with the Word and empowered by the Spirit to bring healing and reconciliation to a broken world.