

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Mark 6:1-13

Ezekiel 2:1-5

Psalm 123

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

July 4, 2021

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

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I want us to focus on two important ideas from our Gospel reading this morning. The first is the ability Jesus has to change bad things in the world. The second is how our response to Jesus affects the world around us.

Let me warn you...this sermon isn't light hearted. At times, we have to cut to the chase and be honest about the seriousness of who we are as people of faith. Today is one of those days.

Mark tells us that Jesus is teaching in the synagogues, providing wisdom to those around him, performing deeds of power. At first the people are astounded...but after a while, they begin to take offense to Jesus. They question him and doubt him.

We also learn that Jesus is in his hometown when this is happening...meaning his own community is turning against him and refuse to believe. That's a tough pill to swallow. To be rejected by those whom you have come to count on. For Jesus, their appreciation turns to accusation. Who does this guy think he is?

Here is what I find incredibly difficult to hear...because of the people's inability, or perhaps their refusal, to believe in Jesus, because of their unwillingness to support and follow him, Jesus becomes unable to do his work within this community. Sure, he cured a few sick people but that was it. All of the good that was being done suddenly turns lackluster and Jesus was stunned at their unbelief.

It's a curious story and frankly it's hard to understand. I have had a hard time getting my head around the idea that Jesus couldn't or wouldn't do any more teaching or healing. It's as though he just stops, hangs his head and walks away. It doesn't seem like the Jesus I have come to know. How about you?

So, let me ask you this...how did the people's response to Jesus impact his ministry? What were the consequences of their unbelief? Well...the consequence was that good stopped being done. Plain and simple.

Jesus' impact was greatly diminished. And then, only a few verses later as he sends the disciples out two by two and he tells them to dust the dirt off of their feet and walk away if this happens to them in another town. Because, Jesus knows it will happen again. People will refuse to believe and to follow and he knows it will have consequences elsewhere.

Consequences of when the actions of a few impact the whole. Jesus is teaching that their refusal to follow matters.

Now...maybe you are asking...Could Jesus have done more? If we believe that he is all powerful, couldn't he just ignore the naysayers and do good in spite of them? Well, yes, he could have done more. So, why didn't he? Why would he let the lack of faith of a few deter him from continuing his healing and teaching for the many?

The answer, I believe, is found not in questioning Jesus' response (or lack thereof), but in questioning *our* response. *What does Jesus expect of us?* If he was amazed at their unbelief then, how would he respond, to how we are acting in the world now? Would he be amazed at our unbelief? Would he be heartbroken over our lack of desire to follow him...not just in our words, not just on Sunday mornings, but in our actions day to day?

I want to offer you this powerful statement on this question of why Jesus couldn't have done more...why didn't he just fix what was broken. Listen to the excerpt from an essay written by former pastor Keith Giles...

*Consider this. Jesus could turn stones into bread and make sure no one was ever hungry again. But then we'd still live in a world where people had too much food and no reason to share with those who had nothing.*

*Jesus could heal every disease and remove sickness from the world. But we would still live in a world where people cared more about themselves than about the needs of others.*

*Jesus could step in and prevent every car accident and rescue every innocent child from hit-and-run drivers. But we would still live in a world where people cared nothing about the safety of others, took foolish chances with their lives, and abused substances to their own destruction.*

*Jesus could guide every bullet so that it always missed taking a life. He could turn our guns into candy canes if He wanted to. But we would still live in a world where people believed in violence and wanted to kill each other.*

*Jesus could appear to everyone and prove that He exists right now. He could float through the air, appear on CNN, visit every human on the planet in person and shoot healing lasers of love out of his eyes. But people would still not love Him or follow Him.*

*Yes, perhaps Jesus has the ability to make it all better, but what really needs changing is us: our hearts, our love for one another, our desire and intention to bring the Kingdom of God to earth for the benefit of our fellow man.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.patheos.com/blogs/keithgiles/2021/04/why-jesus-doesnt-fix-it/?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_campaign=FBCP-PRX&fbclid=IwAR3PR7iP7I5NaIqj7QWuPHG0cAEUS9i7GF14wZsxxHxJQymYfQ8bZqV\\_YqQ](https://www.patheos.com/blogs/keithgiles/2021/04/why-jesus-doesnt-fix-it/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=FBCP-PRX&fbclid=IwAR3PR7iP7I5NaIqj7QWuPHG0cAEUS9i7GF14wZsxxHxJQymYfQ8bZqV_YqQ)

What really needs changing is us. When Jesus offends us, when we fall short of acting faithfully and responsibly, maybe that's the time we need to reconsider our motivations, our fears, the obstacles that stand in our way of doing the work that Jesus calls us to do.

If you find yourself offended or reticent or skeptical, ask yourself...what would Jesus expect of me in this moment? How can I help? How can I believe and act in a way that reduces pain? How can I hold people's hearts with care?

Folks, we don't have time to be offended. We don't have time to let our doubt or our skepticism or our frustration get in the way of living into our relationship with Jesus and with one another. A great piece of advice I heard was that when those emotions and reactions come up within us...whether we are offended by someone's politics, theology, or ethics, whether we have been burnt by systems or people, whether we don't agree with social issues or life choices, instead of letting that define our relationships, look beyond those things and seek to find Jesus. Believe in what he is calling forth in you.

Our unbelief has real world consequences. Our belief does as well. What we choose will always matter.

Thanks be to God. Amen.