

**North Shore Congregational Church**

Located in Fox Point, WI

July 5, 2015

**Shake off the Dust**

**Scripture Readings - Ezekiel 2:1-5, Mark 6:1-13**

Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith

**Shake off the Dust**

Our first reading comes from the prophet Ezekiel. The name Ezekiel means “God strengthens” and we will see this in the reading. Listen now for God’s word as spoken through the prophet, chapter 2 verses 1-5

**Ezekiel 2:1-5**

He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. <sup>2</sup>And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me.

<sup>3</sup>He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. <sup>4</sup>The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD.”

<sup>5</sup>Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

---

Our Gospel reading for this morning comes to us as a two part story. This reading begins with the words, “He left that place and came to his hometown...” So let us review first what are the circumstances surrounding where Jesus has been and what has been happening as he returns to his hometown.

Jesus has been rocking the boat while stilling the storm with a power and command beyond comprehension speaking out saying “peace! ...Be still”

And as Lisa read last week, Jesus participates in healing a woman of a long and debilitating illness and a young girl presumed dead. And for all the doubt in the world Jesus says, “Do not fear...only believe.” (Mark 5:36).

Following this is where we begin this morning in Mark chapter 6 verses 1-13...listen for what God is doing and still saying.

**Mark 6:1-13**

He left *that* place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.

<sup>2</sup>On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!

<sup>3</sup>Is not *this* the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” <sup>5</sup>And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup>And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup>He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup>He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup>but to wear

sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup>He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay *there* until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup>If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” <sup>12</sup>So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup>They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

*This is our reading from the Gospel today.*

Yesterday was the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, a time of celebrations, fireworks, parades and picnics. It is a premiere holiday for the country as we raise up words and themes of independence and freedom. And I found myself reflecting on the relationship these words bear on my faith. What is it to be free in Christ? How does this relate to being a follower of Jesus, a disciple? For me I find the word *independence* doesn't apply for I understand faith...my relationship with God and with others to be one of *interdependence*, a sense of community and purpose in the common good of all, and I am grateful for this.

On Wednesday I returned from the National Association meeting after which Tom and I took a weeks' vacation traveling through some of the National Parks in Utah and Colorado. Although we are daily surrounded by beauty here in Wisconsin, if ever one needs a reminder of God's amazing and ongoing creativity I recommend a trip to Zion where the sun rises pink and yellow on huge rock mountains, or see the colorful spires in Bryce Canyon that look like giant sand drippings or Escalante National Park's huge stair step formations or feel the hot dry sun in Salt Lake City while gazing at snowcapped mountains.

And even in the midst of awe and thankfulness for the beauty we have retained here in our National Parks there was an ongoing feeling of gratitude, sorrow and joy...an awareness of God's presence through both the highs and lows of the past few weeks in our country.

At the National Association meeting that Mark and Laurie Swartwout and I attended we all shared in shock and prayers for the people, the families and the nation grieved by the cruel murders in Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston. We were uplifted by the love and forgiveness that was so quickly offered and yet concerned with heightened awareness as at least 6 more predominantly black churches burned raising the question of arson, a hate crime or natural causes.

At the meeting in Salt Lake City one of the workshops offered was premiered at the National Association conference and presented for the Washington Gladden Society. It was a workshop on social justice titled “What kind of an extremist are you?”

It was particularly poignant and pertinent in its use of side by side photos from the 60's and today of Klu Klux Klan members, and the nonviolent protest of the Civil Rights movement and current photos of protestors holding similar signs. The presentation is designed to encourage discussion about the role any of us can play in taking part in social change. It begins with a quote by Lillian Smith that touches on the heart of discipleship saying, “The question in crisis or ordeal is not: Are you going to be an extremist? The question is: What kind of extremist are you going to be?”

The conversations shared were good and diverse and many of us came away moved by both the progress and lack of progress we share and realizing there is so much more work that God is calling us to do together.

We are aware of violence perpetuated around Synagogues, Mosques and Churches, dissent and loud argument accompanying decisions in our country and we wonder where faith and action come in? Do we wait for the dust to settle or long to leave it all behind, shaking the dust off our feet while turning away?

Our faith tells us no, *this* is not the answer. And when we frame our relationships with those who oppose us, oppress us, annoy us or are simply different from us in the pattern of Jesus we remember what we have experienced and even the words of forgiveness spoken from the cross. God never gives up on us and we know that hope and love and goodness are fully a part of our reality.

But this doesn't let us off the hook as we also hear from our scripture today that being a person of faith, being a disciple is sometimes confusing and definitely challenging, but this is what we are called to be!

Our first reading from the prophet Ezekiel points toward this as well. God has called *and* equipped Ezekiel to speak up to these stubborn and rebellious people that God loves so much...and strangely enough it doesn't seem to matter if others agree with or believe Ezekiel- it only matters that he listens and speaks.

We see this as Jesus comes back to his home town. The people hear him and are "astounded" yet also take offense at him. They move from amazement to what seems a flippant disrespect, asking each other, "who does this guy think he is?" They seem to know too much about Jesus and apparently too little!

Is it possible these home town people thought they knew Jesus so well they didn't need to listen? That there was nothing new to be heard? Or were they worried that the healing and teaching, the miraculous things they were hearing about might bring about changes they were unwilling to accept?

Have you ever heard of someone, or maybe communicated with someone on the phone or by email and formed an opinion or picture of them in your mind that is very different from who they are when you meet them face to face? My husband and I met through a friend who spent months trying to set us up on a blind date. She had told me Tom was *with* the ballet although somehow I didn't hear that he played in the orchestra. And so when we finally met on our first date I looked at Tom and wondered...really? He cannot be a dancer! And those of you who know him, know what I mean.

The people in Jesus' hometown had an idea about what a prophet *should* be and somehow even the things that Jesus was already doing; miraculous healings, casting out demons and commanding a storm to be still, somehow Jesus did not meet their expectations of what they were looking for in terms of "deeds of power."

Nor were they willing to open their hearts and see *living hope* given to them in a new way.

How often do we do that? Do we disregard God's grace right in our midst because it doesn't look our sound like our expectations...or doesn't agree with what we want or expect to hear? Do we write people off as if they have nothing to say to us because they are either too young or too old to understand? Or because they look or love differently than we do? Or because we do not understand the religion or faith or even lack of faith they subscribe to?

And this is where that freedom and responsibility of following Jesus come in...it involves a strange and misunderstood power...the power of love, humility, vulnerability and interdependence.

Our Gospel reading speaks to this. Jesus has been rejected, or at least disregarded. His own people have been pretty inhospitable it seems because *something* about Jesus challenges their embedded concept of right and wrong, power and love. And just as we may begin to wonder what it means when we hear that Jesus could do *no deed of power* we find him creating a new ministry sending his disciples out in pairs, with very little equipment...not even a credit card for all those just in case things that might come up. No, they are to step out in trust, accept what others offer them and follow in the way of the one who sent them. Barbara Brown Taylor commented on the perplexing question of Jesus' power saying, 'Jesus is still Jesus, but the people – then and now – have to be open to him and his transformative power.'

And this is where we get in trouble I think, when we assume that the *other* is the wrong headed stubborn one. When we assume that God would not speak through someone who does not believe the same things we do. When we assume that we know what power means and what powerful deeds look like.

Rick Kiefer had a quote from Charlie Chaplin posted on his facebook page that had me thinking. It said, "You need Power, only when you want to do something Harmful, otherwise love is enough to get everything done." Love and mercy is the strange kind of power that God in Jesus offers us and expects us to offer others.

I am reminded of the words of Martin Luther King Jr. who said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

We are not perfect, none of us, and our expectations of ourselves and others are often skewed, but our lesson from Mark's gospel raises an even more important question, what are our expectations of what God can and will do ~ in and through us?

We are called to speak bravely and boldly and not to diminish what God is already doing. We are called to shake of the dust of limiting self-oriented expectations and to love in the way that Jesus loves.

And as we come together to share in Communion let us pause first in silent prayer to think about what God is saying to us, consider if there is something you are resisting, something you need to let go of or something you need to take up that honors God's call on your life... Amen.

Now let us sing together our Communion Hymn #525 One Bread, One Body (1 Cor 10:16-17; 12:4; Gal 3:28) by John B. Foley, 1978

Refrain

One bread, one body,  
one Lord of all,  
one cup of blessing which we bless.  
And we, though many,  
throughout the earth,  
we are one body in this one Lord.

1. Gentile or Jew,  
servant or free,  
woman or man, no more.

2. Many the gifts,  
many the works,  
one in the Lord of all.

3. Grain for the fields,  
scattered and grown,  
gathered to one, for all.

### **Invitation to the Table**

When we look to the relationships we wish to have with God and each other we realize we are broken, but this is not God's desire for us. So come to this table that carries God's love and forgiveness. In this church, all are welcome to share in Communion here. You do not need to be a member, You need only wish to open your heart to Jesus. As the bread and cup are passed we wait until all are served and take in each together. Come...

### **Prayer of Confession**

Gracious God, we are not perfect and we are thankful that You do not expect us to be. Forgive us when we expect too little of ourselves and too much of others. Remind us that You called disciples, average imperfect people, to do great things just as you call us today. Remind us to love those we do not understand and forgive us when we close our ears, minds and heart to the ways you try to grow us. Forgive us loving God when we close ourselves from you and the people and world you have given us to care for. Help us in our unbelief and teach us to trust you more. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

God welcomes you to this place. God extends hospitality to all through this table of Christ. Forgive as you are forgiven. Accept that you are welcomed and loved by God. And come to the table.

### **\*Gloria Patri**

### **Words of Institution**

### **Distribution of the Bread**

### **Distribution of the Cup**

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

### **Prayer of Invocation and The Lord's Prayer**

Gracious and Creating God,

It is You who is the grounding and source of our lives. You seek to create something new in us as we seek to know you and follow you. You ask us to speak bolding of Your love and You offer to equip us in ways we don't always understand. So we ask you with trust to teach us to pray just as you taught your disciples to pray so long ago 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 and the power and the glory forever. Amen

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Gracious God, If we could remember to look on the world from afar and see the world that you created without lines drawn as borders or walls and barriers placed as boundaries...we might see better how we are all created in Your image.

We thank you for our Communion today and for the way you create a community of people that stretches beyond these walls and this moment. Help us to build bridges where we have put up walls. Help us to have ears that can hear you speaking through people and situations we would not expect to hear and give us voices to speak in places and circumstances that we have not yet imagined.

Just as you have invited us and prepared a table around which we all may come cause us to open our hearts to welcome one and other to share in a grace that is more than we are.

We pray with gratitude for the freedom we have in you and the interdependence that makes us whole. In Jesus' name...Amen.

**Benediction**

Go now in the peace and love and inspiration that is given to us all through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

©North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point, WI