

“Freedom to Serve Christ”

Mark 6: 1-13

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

Jesus rejected in his home town. Jesus preaches the gospel to the people of Nazareth as recorded in Mark 6. Jesus grew up in Nazareth and was therefore known in this area because that was where Mary and Joseph settled. Later Jesus goes into the synagogue to preach, and many were astonished and surprised. They were familiar with Jesus as a young child, but now He was speaking with such wisdom, and performing miracles of healing on a number of people. Many of the people of Nazareth found it difficult to believe that this was the same Jesus who they witnessed growing up as a child. The residents asked one another, whether this Jesus is the one who was the son of the carpenter Joseph? Are not the rest of his siblings still living in Nazareth?

Pride can easily take over. The people were too proud to believe that “one of their own” could be so wise in the scriptures. Jesus was born of a modest household and they thought that he was unworthy to be so highly informed and educated in the scriptures.

In today’s world we experience similar situations. We can become envious of another when they are doing well or have made an amazing achievement – especially people we know. Pride and envy can blind people of the reality in front of them. Their vision is distorted because of their biases and prejudices.

When Jesus left and decided to preach in cities where He was unknown, His message was easily received, since Jesus had no previous identity there. In other places, Jesus had no biases held against Him. In fact, no one knew Jesus’ socioeconomic status. Therefore, without any preconceived ideas, envy or biases, Jesus was heard not only for the content of the gospel he preached but also in the love he showed to those he encountered.

⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief. Jesus was determined to share the good news of hope, joy, peace and love to those he knew, but was disappointed. In spite of what Jesus said and did, the unbelief of these people was very surprising.

What is holding you back from receiving Jesus? Has the message of Jesus become so familiar and ordinary that it does not spark excitement in your heart? Maybe we are so invested in our culture with all its entertainment and distractions, that we do not have room for Jesus. In your mind, you are just too busy.

When we discern what habits we are following in life, we ask whether the way we are living our life has us under its power? In I Corinthians 6: 12 we read, *“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything”* (NRSV). As followers of Christ, we would not

want to be under the power of anyone or anything but Jesus. If something is taking a hold on you, then maybe you need to cut it loose.

Some of us meditate daily on worries. When one meditates on worry, the anxiety grows and fills even more of our thoughts. We live in a competitive individualist culture which unfortunately creates anxiety and the feeling of being alone. On the contrary, meditating on the love of God in Jesus Christ will help to fill the space in our mind with thoughts of God's steadfast love and presence which helps to crowd out the anxious thoughts.

Releasing the obstacles. In our Christian faith the Holy Spirit is alive in us to encourage and counsel each one of us towards a deeper relationship with Christ. When in a rut, we can pray to the Lord asking him to help release us from the obstacles which prevent the formation of our faith in Christ. God comes to us and his spirit lives inside us. This is a gift of God's grace! We can open our hearts and physically our hands to receive God's love. When you receive that love, it is yours to carry with you and to share. This is the good news of God's presence of love which you would want to share! The love of God and love of others then becomes your focus in life.

11 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. Jesus instructed his disciples to leave places where the people are not interested in believing by 'shaking the dust from their feet.' This does not mean a total rejection of these people you are speaking to. They have not received the message, but as people they are not rejected! I believe Jesus is teaching that when one has tried to share the Good news of the Grace of Christ in the spirit of Christ's love and the message has not been accepted, do not let that rejection of the message stay with you. Shake it off like sand from the beach that is uncomfortable in your sandal. In other words, do not take that rejection personally, but be free to move on to others with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we are the ones who are putting up the obstacles and the Good News cannot get to us. The obstacles of pride, envy, materialism, worry, past hurts get in the way of Christ's message of love. In his steadfast love, Christ wants your hands and hearts to be open to receive the blessings Jesus has to offer. Through the Holy Spirit, he knocks on the door of your life and desires that you open that door. *"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me (Revelations 3: 20)."*

Freedom to serve Christ. Let go of the obstacles holding you back. Receive Christ today and every day. Live in the joy of the freedom in Christ. Come to the table of the Lord today and receive his grace made visible in the bread and wine (grape juice). *"Taste and See that the Lord is good (Psalm 34: 8)."* Amen.