

“Is This Not the Carpenter’s Son?”

Mark 6:1-6

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July 8, 2012

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When we open the Bible to the Gospels, we’re usually in search of a word of Good News. In the brief story for today from Mark’s Gospel, the Good News is found only by implication.

Jesus has returned to his home town, Nazareth, where he has met with fierce resistance to his teaching. They all recognize him as the carpenter’s son who grew up down the street, and everyone assumes his knowledge is surely limited to measuring a plank twice and cutting it once. They are not open to his having gained other sorts of wisdom. In short, they don’t trust him to be a prophetic voice; don’t believe he has any kind of authority outside of the carpenter’s shop. They trust him to build a cabinet, but they have no intention of trusting him with eternal truths, truths that have the power to set them free.

The tragedy is that their slowness to believe restricts his ability to heal their wounds. The implied Good News is that there is a direct connection between belief and healing, between embracing the authority of the Christ and finding the wholeness for which the soul longs. THAT is the Good News. There is a soul-body connection!

Of course, those who raised the question: ‘Is this not the Carpenter’s son?’ are unconscious of their own woundedness, unconscious of their own need for a healer. They are hurting, and they don’t know it. These wielders of power are compromised by their own tight grip on the power structure.

They are so intent on maintaining control of authority they don't see how this greed is eating away at their own souls.

They see Jesus as a threat to their power rather than as one who holds the key to the true abundance of life, found not in power but in love poured out.

There came a time when the disciples took Jesus aside and pressed him on why he had come, what his purpose really was. He told them, "I have come that you might have life with abundance!"

So, from the very beginning, the Good News of Jesus Christ was counter-cultural. The culture identified abundance with power. Jesus identified abundance with love poured out.

In raising the question, "Is this not the carpenter's son?" the power holders were trying to discredit Jesus as one who had no legitimate power, no recognized authority. The irony is that he was the very One they desperately needed to embrace.

I'd like to tell you a story from our recent mission trip at the Heifer Farm in Rutland, Massachusetts. Though I have often been amazed by our middle school youth, what happened there late Thursday afternoon I will never forget. This is a story about 29 South Church youth who demonstrated that they understand where the real abundance is found. Earlier in the week, they had been engaged in farm chores they had never done before: de-worming sheep, milking goats, feeding chickens, watering a yak. Nothing could have prepared them for Thursday afternoon's discovery of a goat who had just died. Right there, in the small pasture in front of their Ghana hut, 7th and 8th graders were confronted with the reality of death.

Now, they could easily have spoken from the place of power that comes with living in a relatively affluent community, saying, 'It's just a goat, who cares? There's ten more where that one came from.' They could have pretended this death had not affected them one iota, and simply moved on to the next task.

They could have reacted from that place of power that refuses to be touched by the pain of the world. Instead, they summoned all the other youth from the other areas of the global village to come and stand with them, to grieve with them. They turned to me and asked if we could have a memorial service right then, right there. Stories were told about the goat's life; value was assigned to the goat's life; we even imagined what the goat might hope for us as we wrapped up our week on the farm. We stood in silence. We prayed. We held hands. There was a healing that took place in that circle of middle high students and advisors. It's the healing that comes when the attitude of power is set aside such that the true abundance can gain a foothold.

People have been asking me about the mission trip. How did it go? Until now, it's been hard to put it into words. What I can answer now is how grateful I am to be associated with youth who are coming to see where the true abundance lies, who are unlikely to ask 'Is this not the carpenter's son?' and who are choosing to believe that love poured out is where legitimate power is born.

That's really what I wanted to say today in response to that brief text in Mark chapter 6. As always, I share my reflection with you in the greatest of hope. Amen!