

Trinity 4B
Mark 6:1-6
5th July 2009

The Gospel of Mark is filled with action. From the beginning Jesus is teaching, healing, and casting out demons. By the time we get to chapter 6, we have witnessed many miracles which Jesus has done. Then he comes home to Nazareth. Nazareth, that little backwater town that is despised and looked down on by the rest of Israel. Here is their big chance to show that something good can come out of Nazareth. We would expect that the Nazareth newspaper would run the headline, "Local Boy Makes Good" We might expect them to name a street after him or to at least to invite him to be the guest of honour at the Rotary club. Yet, we soon discover that this is not the case. Jesus comes into town and goes to the synagogue on the sabbath. He takes his place as an adult male and teaches that day. He is not like the Jesus they watched grow up. He has grown and changed. He is no longer the obedient child learning to handle a carpenter's plane. He stands tall and speaks with authority. He has words and ideas that are far beyond what he could have learned in Nazareth. The stories of the mighty deeds he has done are talked about in hushed tones as his one-time neighbours listen to him teach. And they are offended! "He is not like one of us." "He has changed." "Who does he think he is, anyway?" Few listen to his words and he can do very little good among them. Jesus comes to recognize that a prophet can be recognized anywhere but at home.

Some of us have experienced this when we have gone away to University, or taken a job out of town. We find ourselves in a new place with new people who don't know what we were like back home. Suddenly, we have the freedom to change and be different. The quiet person becomes a stand-up comedian or the life of the party. The kid who couldn't remember to take out the rubbish bins even when you reminded him every day now has become a leader in his work and is quickly promoted. Then we come back home. We walk in the door changed and new and happy with who we are becoming and "Wham!" we are hit in the face with the presence of all these people who have known us all our lives and who treat us just the same way they have since we were born. Old habits begin to rise up in us and we find it very difficult or even impossible to hold on to the changes we have experienced within ourselves. We can be who we need to be anywhere but home.

When we try to make changes in our lives, these changes can cause ripple effects into the lives of others. Even when people don't particularly like the way we have been, when we change, it can make them uncomfortable. The old patterns that were familiar are broken. We don't react as we once did. So we may find our family struggling with the changes in our lives. We need to remember that they are not setting out to be a stumbling block to us. Usually, they are just dealing with their discomfort in the changes they see in us. Their reactions may be negative, but it is often without their even being aware of it themselves. Sometimes they are aware of it and are very vocal about our changes. We can't understand why they aren't more supportive. Don't they love us? Don't they want what is best for us? We should not take such behaviour as a sign of not being loved or cared for by our families. We have upset the equilibrium and they are reacting to it at a very deep emotional level without taking the time to reflect on what they are doing. So we need to act accordingly. We need to think. We don't blame them and we don't try to get back at them. We stay calm and we stay with our changes. The changes may be hard for us to make, and hard for them to take at the moment, but we have decided this is the best course and we must stick to it. We take Jesus as our example. He didn't run away from home but rather stuck to his itinerary and went on about his ministry. He did not desert his family and friends though they certainly did not understand or approve of what he was doing. He knew who he was and he knew what he had to do and he went about doing it. We will find him back in Nazareth from time to time and we will find him relating to his mother and the rest of his family.

There is a lesson to be learned for those of us who find someone changing in the midst of our family. We need to help them through these times of change. If they are trying to live out the faith as disciples of Jesus, then as Christians we would think this would be easy, but it isn't always. We may not understand the changes and the choices they make may not fit into our understanding of the faith. If they are rebelling against the Christian

lifestyle or opting for some other path, then it is even more difficult for us. But our actions still need to be the same. We need to make sure that they know they are loved and cared for, regardless of the choices they make. We need to keep our emotions in check and try to keep our crying and our screaming to a minimum, at least in front of them. The most help we can be is to openly and honestly ask them to share with us about the choices they are making. Inviting them to share with us their understanding of life and how they are trying to live that out not only helps us to better understand what they are going through but it helps them to think it through more completely. When we see problems with their choices we need to respectfully inquire if they have thought through what might be the consequences of the actions in regard to certain issues. We won't help the situation by telling them what terrible, drastic things are going to befall them if they keep following their stupidity. None of us want to be wrong and especially not in front of our families. But, if people are given the option and the room to explore for themselves, they are more likely to take those options seriously and modify their behaviour.

When those we love and care for so much continue to make the choices that we can see are unwise, what can we do? We can continue to love them and accept them. Most of us have made mistakes once or twice in our own lives. We may have hurt others and ourselves with them but we have survived and learned from them. They will, too. We can hold them in prayer. Not praying that they will change and do what we think they should, but rather that they will make the best choice possible for them. We can trust God. We can place our faith in the one who loves us even when we are making mistakes. We can place our loved ones with confidence in the hands of the one who will never leave them or forsake them, and we can remember that with all good intentions Jesus' mother and family thought that he was mad. They were wrong and they learned that eventually. It just could be that the great mistake we see our loved one making is exactly what God is calling them to do.