

A Receptive Place

Mark 6:1-13

Have you ever wondered if Jesus ever sang? Can you imagine Jesus hanging around with people and playing instruments together or when he walked from village to village do you think he hummed a tune? It isn't actually in the Bible clearly that Jesus sang as a part of his own rhythm of life or when that he sang when he was in community. The closest that we come to it from what I have read is in both Matthew and Mark where they refer to the first night of Passover, after he had shared his last supper with his friends, they did one last thing together before they headed out into the night. "When they had sung the hymn," both evangelists say, "they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matt. 26:30, Mark 14:26).

And many would believe that there is every reason to believe that the hymn would be the Hallel—Psalms 113 through 118—sung during evening prayers on the first night of Passover from Jesus' day to our own.¹

And I think for my own faith formation, it would have been so helpful to have heard from the pulpit about Jesus singing or laughing. It seems fairly obvious Jesus had a wry sense of humor. He was pretty witty.

And I would love it if somewhere it said in the Bible, "And Jesus threw his head back and laughed until tears ran down his face. And everyone else caught the laughter and joined in." Or when Jesus took time with the children, we could read that he played tag with them or whatever the games were then.

Do we assume that Jesus never laughed because we have never read about it?

Laughing Jesus pictures

I hope you can hold that picture of Jesus laughing. For me it works on something inside of me- that I don't know everything about someone even when I think I do. I don't know what motivates them, what keeps them up at night, what they long for. I may have an initial presumption of who someone is when they walk in the door and how is that fair to them?

Even when we *have* gotten to know someone we can hold them to who we want them to be. The hometown crowd at Nazareth did this to Jesus.

Here comes Jesus back to his hometown after having some successful healings in other villages. He just healed a synagogue leader's daughter. He healed, in kind of an unconventional way, a woman who suffered from a long illness of bleeding. He had cast out demons in a man ostracized outside the city and he now had a group of students who are learning from him. And he steps into the synagogue and starts to teach the people that knew him as a little boy. These are the people that knew the scandal around his conception, the people that watched his family and what they did for a living. And The Message says,:

¹ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-03/and-jesus-sang>

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

7/7/2024

Luann Yutzy

“He stole the show, impressing everyone. “We had no idea he was this good!” they said. “How did he get so wise all of a sudden?”

That reminds me of something Mark Twain has said, that when he was a boy of 14 he thought his father was so ignorant he could hardly stand to be around him and then when he turned 21 he was amazed at how much his father had learned in 7 years.

But back to Nazareth, “ in the next breath they were cutting him down: “He’s just a carpenter—Mary’s boy. We’ve known him since he was a kid. We know his brothers, James, Justus, Jude, and Simon, and his sisters. Who does he think he is?” (The Message)

We, more than maybe a lot of ethnic groups, hold people to their pedigree. I wasn't very familiar with that word it just wasn't used a lot until about 7 years ago, Robert and I were in a ministry assignment in another state and at a funeral meal a man from the community came up to me and handed me a number of papers and said, “Here's your pedigree.” Like wow, what do you mean?” He was a historian in the area and this was a fairly sheltered community, even geographically, and when someone new came into the area, people checked them out.

I came to appreciate the pedigree that he handed me because with that pedigree and the people’s knowledge, we found out that one of my ancestors that came over from another country landed there first and he was actually buried on the hill behind us where we rented that year. We got to see the original home farm that still had the little house that he first built. My ancestors went on further west after a generation but my pedigree was very important and had to be looked into.

Here in Mark 6, we can hear a little bit of holding Jesus to the scandal of being “Mary's boy” as the crowd says. Notice a father is not named. It's only certain that Mary was the parent in the situation.

In this case then what they already knew about Jesus and how they held onto that as they listened to him in the synagogue caused them to have their amazement at his ability change directions into, “How dare he become this great teacher?” The Message, Eugene Peterson's, The Message again says it well:

”They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further.”

Their inability to be receptive to something different than they knew kept them from the blessing of the good deeds and healing that Jesus would have been able to do and he wasn't able to. They never got any further and he in turn was amazed back at them at their stubbornness.

It's an interesting combination of being offended and a lack of faith. There really isn't anything that can grow in that kind of culture.

When we are offended it is something to pay attention to. It is a reaction to something and being offended is usually having something to do with not wanting to give something up and trying to protect something. In this case it could be that the people didn't want Jesus to be anybody different than them.

So Jesus turns to the disciples and says, "All right, you all get ready to go out there and preach the Good News. I thought it really interesting to wonder if Jesus had the disciples witness this hometown experience so that they would see a failure. Failure can teach us so much, if we let it.

A good question for a search committee to have in an interview with a potential candidate for a pastor is to ask them to tell you about a time of failure. You'll be able to tell a lot about a person if they can talk about a time of pain or failure in their ministry and not blame.

The disciples probably looked at Jesus and said, "Wait a minute we just saw what happened here and you're Jesus and you want us to go out? You're asking us? Jesus says, Yes, wear sandals, take a staff and if this kind of thing happens to you, shrug your shoulders, shake the dust off and go on. I'm giving you authority and this authority I'm giving you is about powerlessness, depending on the strangers you find to be people that know what a theology of abundance is about, staying in their homes with them. This authority is about relationships. And yes, there will be places and people that just don't want to hear it and there isn't a lot we can do about that. We keep being the leaders, being the people of this new kind of kingdom that doesn't make sense.

This passage this morning that we are living with is the last time we read in Mark of Jesus teaching from a synagogue. That's something to pay attention to. We put a lot of priority in having a church building and being in church in a certain space and I'm not just talking about here, it's a lot of churches. It could be an assumption that we have that we can only worship in this space. That's something to think about. The movement here after this scripture is Jesus teaches out there, by the sea, on the plains. He teaches from a boat. The good news is bigger than a sanctuary. The good news is more expansive than a certain line-up in worship.

The apostles are sent out to call for change. Mark is the gospel that describes the arrival of something new.

How receptive are we to change?

How open are we to keep growing -in here?

St. Gregory of Nyssa, a theologian from the 4th century in what is known as Turkey, today offers a helpful, succinct, and useful definition of sin. “Sin, he [suggested], is a refusal to keep growing.”²

Growing in our faith means outgrowing something. It might be outgrowing how we perceive things about people or about God. Part of the growth might be to be aware that we are even doing it.

How can we grow as a faith community?

I wonder if the crowd there that day in Nazareth took a step back after Jesus shook the dust off and left to find another place that wanted to grow. I wonder if they said, “What caused me to react so strongly to him that I would reject him?” What is it about me?

What was it about myself that became a block to receiving Jesus for who he was?

This inner work is some of the hardest work we will do and some people never touch it their whole lives. It is hard to say we have failed or we missed it or we had an assumption that locked someone else (Jesus) in to place.

When we act on our assumptions, truth stumbles around and we miss out on what God is doing among us. “They tripped over what little they knew and fell, sprawling.”

It may make us question that Jesus’ power was limited by peoples’ unbelief and cold reception.

Episcopalian minister, Barbara Brown Taylor has a helpful metaphor to illustrate this. Jesus was still Jesus she says, but the people—then and now—have to be open to him and his transformative power. She compares this to the experience of trying to light a match to a pile of wet sticks: “So call this an ‘un-miracle’ story, in which Jesus held the match until it burned out in his hand, while his family and friends sat shaking their heads a safe distance away.” Instead of working great wonders, Jesus had to walk away from his own hometown that day, and went on “to go shine his light somewhere else”³

² Jean Daniélou, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa’s Mystical Writings*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press: 1979, ©1961), 60. In his works *The Life of Moses* and *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Gregory of Nyssa used the Greek word *epektasis* (expansion) to describe the soul’s inherent and ever-increasing desire to grow toward God’s goodness.

³ (*Bread of Angels*).https://www.ucc.org/sermon-seeds/sermon_seeds_july_8_2018/

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

7/7/2024

Luann Yutzy

Jesus was not the only one God sent to shake us up, giving us opportunities to grow. We sometimes need to get out of our own way to go forward - the outward movement with the apostles, traveling lightly, finding the people, open people, the receptive ones. In my experience it is the people who have had pain and failure and have let the pain and failure teach them, soften them, to where it is grace, grace, grace that flows from them. Grace and wisdom. We can't take someone where we have not gone ourselves. Working on our inner voices and assumptions is a place to start, recognize what we are doing and take a step back, asking ourselves questions. We interrupt ourselves and start again. Grace, grace, grace.

Do we believe that God can do more than we can imagine? Do we have room within us to allow for some mystery that may not ever be able to be pinned down? Do we believe that the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus that Jesus left us with is alive and well in this world?

Amen?

And we are Good News with others. We go two by two, not on our own. God is always calling us forward.

Growing in our faith means we will outgrow something. God may/will surprise us with opportunities to grow. May we long for the transformation of our hearts and the renewing of our minds as we continue to grow as a faith community. We are in this together.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

Benediction:

Go, knowing you are beloved by God.

Go, praising God for the good news in Jesus Christ.

Go, living the message of God's grace, peace, and love. Amen.⁴

⁴ Eleanor Epp-Stobbe, www.togetherinworship.net