

Sermon - July 7, 2024

There is a word that has entered our common lexicon, which is basically common language of the people, and the word is *adulthood*. A lot of the younger generation, as they grow older and learn about the responsibilities of what it means to be an adult on your own, refer to that process as adulthood. Those of us who have done the adulthood thing can tell you adulthood is hard. It's hard to be responsible. It's hard to be the one who's grown up and to do your thing. It's even harder to do that when those around you don't want you to be the adult that you have come to be. Jesus even experienced that challenge, and that's a part of what the scripture lesson today reminds us.

Jesus has now been called into his ministry; he's been baptized, he's been blessed by the Holy Spirit to go and be who God has created him to be. He goes back to his home town to do ministry there, just like he's done everywhere else; to teach in their synagogues, to heal the sick, to cast out demons. He starts to do that. Those that have watched him grow, who have seen him as a carpenter with his father, are astounded by the lessons he is able to teach them. Their reaction, when he began to teach in the synagogue on the Sabbath, was astonishment. It says, "...many who heard him were astonished." They recognized that he was teaching with authority, he understood what it was. Then that reaction changes. We don't know what causes the change, but we know by the end of their time with him they're offended that he is willing to share what he knows of God.

They said, "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." I wonder if that struggle is because this is one that they watched grow. 'How can this one know more than us now?' I wonder if because he was not acting in the expected way that they thought he should act, because of his upbringing, if that's what offended them? Because again, he behaved no differently there than he had anywhere else; and Jesus claims what's going on in that moment. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.'" This struggle, with his identity with his family, is actually an echo of a similar incident that we talked about several weeks ago earlier in the Gospel of Mark when his mother and siblings come to find him because they are afraid that he's going insane; they were concerned for his sanity. In that moment, Jesus claims the community around him as his family. He claims the community as kin, the kinship bonded together as children of God. Jesus didn't let their skepticism, their offense, fully stop him. He still was able to do a little bit, "...except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them." But beyond that they wouldn't let them.

When we hear that where do we see ourselves in this story? Because Jesus has taken the 12 with him: those that have been with him in his ministry, who have heard him teach, who have watched the miracles, they're with him in the circumstance. His sisters are there present, and then there's the town in which he grew up. Often times I think we like to put ourselves in the positive light and say we're one of the disciples and we would allow Jesus to do what he did. I wonder how many times we become like that town, but because God doesn't do things the way that we expect God to do, or the way that God has always done it, we get offended when God does something different. Or we don't allow ourselves to be the ones to whom God ministers, because God's not doing it the way that we want God to do it.

It was a struggle for Jesus to be where he was, but he didn't allow that struggle to defeat his purpose. He continued to heal. Then he said, 'It's not just my job.' Not literally, but in the way that he sends out those who are with him; because the next thing he does isn't to just go by himself. He gathers those twelve, and he sends them out two by two. "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." Then he tells them how they're to go out. "He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics." He's sending them out much like he is, depending upon others; to sustain him, to care for him as he seeks to care in a different way. Then he warns them "He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 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.'"

There's some debate as to what that would mean. Some think that shaking off the dust from a town was a sign of disrespect and vulgarity, kind of a 'what's it to you' kind of thing. Others aren't quite sure. One of the professors, Matt Skinner, from Luther Seminary, talks about how this really is more of a reciprocal kind of thing. We look at it as a sign of disrespect. but he says if you think about it, what Jesus is saying is do what they've done to you. They will not welcome you and so don't even take the dust from the town with you, let that go behind you, and keep moving forward. That's what the shaking off the dust can mean. Let it go. Put it behind you. Keep going. Do what I've asked.

I don't know about you but sometimes I get stuck and I can't shake the dirt off. A comment, an incident,

clings, and sometimes the pain from that prevents me from doing the next thing that God would ask of me. Jesus has shown the disciples what to do because he's just experienced it. In his home town people were offended; they wouldn't let him do what God was calling him to do, and so he moved on. He doesn't judge them, he doesn't condemn them. He recognizes the situation, lets it go, and moves on with his ministry. That's what he encourages his disciples to do; focus on your mission, focus on the proclamation, focus on doing what is yours to do. If others will not receive it, let it go and move on.

How many times do we not let it go and move on? It's hard, it's part of what "adulting" teaches us to do. In the midst of the challenge focus on the ministry. In the midst of the challenge, focus on the ministry. So, with this lesson in hand the disciples move out. "They went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them."

Today is July 7th. It is the closest Sunday to July 6th, and why does that matter? It matters because July 6th is the date that we mark that John Hus was burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church in the 1400s. Why is that important? Because it was based on his theology and his understanding of how we should be church that a group of followers forty years later formed what was called The Unitas Fratrum, what we know today as The Moravian Church. He stood firm in what he believed his ministry was to be; preaching that all are seen equally by our God; that whatever status we have on earth doesn't matter in God's eyes, we are all equal. To foster that equality, he believed that the worship, the bible, the hymns should all be in the common language of the people. Because in the 1400s, worship was only in Latin, and unless you were educated you had no understanding of what was being said during that service. He also believed that we should be able to come to God, one-on-one, to ask forgiveness, rather than buy what was called "indulgences", something you could get so that you could be forgiven for something you haven't done yet. He also believed that because we are all equal we should all receive the same elements when we come to the Lord's table. In the 1400s in the Roman Catholic Church only priests were allowed to drink the cup. The people just got the bread. Hus believed that the priests were no better than anyone else, and so that everyone should have both the bread and the cup.

He was willing to stand firm in his ministry even when those in his home town, those to whom he ministered condemned him, called him a heretic. Gave him a chance to recant (which means to take back what he had said) and he said, 'No. From what I know of God in the Bible, show me where I am wrong and I'll take it back. But if I'm not wrong I'm not going to take it back.' Instead of opening their understanding, they condemned him as a heretic and burned him at the stake. His bravery to stay true to his faith is one of the things that led his followers to form a new kind of church, a new way to worship God, where no one was any better than anyone else, that we were united as siblings in God's eyes. We are the legacy of that; just like Hus is a legacy of being willing to focus on the ministry.

We are all called to be ministers. If you look at the back of the bulletin where it lists who participates in worship each week, look under ministers. It's not my name. All of us are ministers of God. All who seek to serve our Lord are ministers of God. I happen to be the pastor, and I serve in this role as a member of the community. It is why when a pastor is installed at a church they become a member of the congregation first. I am one of the body. My role within the body is to come forward to lead worship, to do the pastoral care, to officiate the sacraments and rites of the congregation, and facilitate the body doing the body's ministry. If you've ever wondered why I don't just pop out from the side room, it's because I like to physically live that out. So, when I come to worship I come from within the body, and when worship is over I come back into the body. I am not any better than anyone else. I make just as many mistakes as everyone else, and just like everyone else I struggle to stay faithful to the ministry that God has called me to. The blessing is we always have the chance to try again. Today we get to have a reminder. We come to the table, we celebrate communion, we give back to God and confess to God what holds us back, the mistakes that we've made, and we receive from God the assurance that we're forgiven so that we can be sent by God to continue our ministry.

In the Moravian Church we celebrate communion in a very special and unique way. We allow the pastor to consecrate the elements. The pastor and a member of the board will serve the element to you where you are. We ask that you hold onto the element, the bread or the cup, until everyone has been served, and we can take communion together; individuals as part of the body.

Today we celebrate. We have been called and sent by God. We have work to do, ministry to share, and we have the opportunity to recommit to God that we will focus on that ministry, so that we can be a blessing in God's name.