

Pentecost 5, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Mark 6: 1 – 6

We are today in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 6. We are told, that Jesus went to His hometown, and on the Sabbath began to teach in the synagogue where He had grown up. And those who heard Him, were astounded. “Where did He get all this?” they wondered. “What does He think He’s doing up there, who does He think He is, isn’t He the carpenter, the Son of Mary?” And they were offended by Him.

The Word of God. And we pray:

Lord Jesus, we admit, most days we would rather be liked by the world than loved by you. The approval of the world is smooth, and easy, but the way of the cross is difficult. Help us overcome our fear, and our laziness, and our greed, and shape us instead by your cross. Lead us Lord, that we might truly learn to love you, the way you first loved us. Lord Jesus in your name, AMEN.

I’d like to begin this morning, with my conclusion: If it is *easy* to be a Christian. You may not be doing it right. If you think it’s a snap following the Lord Jesus, the one who died on a cross; if you find it no big deal no serious challenge to bear His name and walk in His footsteps in this world today, then you might have missed something somewhere along the line, if you think it’s easy to be a Christian. Friend, you might not be doing it right.

Look at the experience of Jesus Himself. Everywhere He goes in the Gospels, no matter which way He turns, He’s on the receiving end of cold stares and icy rejection. And this includes even those times Jesus works astounding miracles! John chapter 6, Jesus feeds the 5000, you’d think after

that He'd be "feeling the luv" from everybody, but no. By the end of the chapter, people are walking out on Him, they are openly dismissing Him. Mark chapter 5, Jesus heals a man possessed by demons—only to be politely asked by the man's neighbors to leave, and leave immediately. Of course there's the incident at the end of Jesus' life on earth—what's it called again?—oh yeah, the crucifixion? After all the ministry and all the miracles, to literally get nailed by the people you thought you were helping. And then today's story. Preaching in His hometown, in front of all the great aunts and grandmas who thought He was just so cute, you know, if ever in Jesus' life and ministry there should have been a slam dunk, this was it. This was it, instead, even in that place and with those people—rejection. Why? Why was it so hard to be Jesus?

Well there was the message, first of all. There was the preaching and teaching that Jesus always did. "God wants to forgive you," Jesus would say to the crowds. That's nice, that's fine—but see, to hear Jesus say this, it means He's also saying you've done stuff that needs to be forgiven. To be told that God wants to put you right means that you've been wrong all along, people don't usually want to hear that. *We* don't usually want to hear that, fine to be told *in general* we are forgiven. Much less fun to be forced to take a long hard look at specifically what about us needs to be forgiven, and

where we need to change, and that's what Jesus does. "God wants to give you eternal life," Jesus would say—now who could possibly get irritated by that? How could that ever annoy anyone?—but, see, a life focused on eternity is going to be different than a life focused merely on the momentary. To live God's eternal kind of life, Jesus was saying, you're going to have to change the way you live, right now. You're going to have to be changed, made new by God into the kind of person *He* wants you to be—no longer the kind of person, *you* want to be. Ok, that could be a little annoying, don't you think?

And even when Jesus wasn't preaching. Even without words, His whole way of life. To follow God means, you are not going to follow the crowd. To please God, means you're not interested in simply pleasing yourself, or even the people around you. To follow God is to reject a lot of what this world has to offer—and the world knew that back then. They sensed it. They rejected Jesus, because on some level they knew, He was rejecting something in them.

So for us today, if we somehow find it easier to follow God than Jesus did. If we find it easier to follow God than Jesus did the question is Why? How? And I suspect the answer is, we're fudging. We're fudging, we confess our sins in general, without ever looking at what we actually say and do each

day that offends God and hurts the people God has given us to care for. We long for eternal life, but will not let go of the pleasant distractions of this life, it's hard to hold on to the cross of Christ if you won't let go of yourself, you know. Our whole way of life. Our whole way of life simple blends in with the world around us—our use of time, and money. Our priorities through the week, and on Sunday morning. Our choices in entertainment, the way we relate to our families, the way we handle frustration, our words our deeds our life, like everybody else. We don't seem to reject much of anything in the world as it is, so ok, the world hasn't really rejected us, how nice. Of course it's easy to be a Christian, if you're half-hearted about it. Of course it's easy to be a Christian—if you don't want to do it right.

Christianity is simple, the Gospel is not complicated. In the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you, and for His sake God forgives you all your sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, He gives the power to become the very children of God—people not merely of this world, but of the next. People shaped and molded not merely by this world, but by a cross, and the promise of an empty tomb. Christianity is simple—trust Jesus, believe Jesus, follow Jesus, He will keep His promises to you, every last one of them! Christianity is simple, but it shouldn't exactly be easy, should it? Not if we let ourselves be conformed each day to the image and likeness of

the one who died and rose again, even Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name
we pray, AMEN.