

Disbelief Cripples Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B July 5, 2015 9:00 AM Ez 2:2-5; 2 Cor 12:7-10; **Mk 6:1-6** (God has a plan for you greater than anything you could imagine, but you have to trust.)

“He was amazed at their lack of faith.”

We could say that this is the beginning of rough times for Jesus. It's really the beginning of his passion. Why? Because **his passion is all about his being rejected and mocked, and that's starting now.** The townspeople of Nazareth, his hometown, are doing him the honor of beginning his passion. This will culminate one day in Jerusalem with his crucifixion. The accusation is this: how could he be a real prophet when we know his family, and they are nobodies? They are our neighbors. Who does he think he is? It's that kind of attitude. It's a kind of **mockery**; and, sadly, **it's also self-contempt because they are all part of the same sort of world.** They all share the same kind of life, and they are all contemptuous of it. What good can come out of Nazareth?

On the one hand, **Jesus accepts this abuse**; he always does. He has equanimity. He has even indifference to evil coming at him. But on the other hand, and the evangelist makes this very clear, it cripples his ability to do mighty works. It ties his hands. **He can't do anything because of their lack of faith.** So his work goes unfinished, undone.

Now the crucial issue here is not our desire for God; it's **God's desire for us. This is what Jesus is trying to open up**, to reveal to people, that God has great plans for you, for everybody, for the world, for the creation. But Jesus cannot begin to enact this plan because there's **no receptivity.** That's what it means: “He was amazed at their lack of faith.” In the King James Version it says, **“He marveled because of their unbelief.”** That's actually more accurate. He marveled, he was amazed, he was shocked at their unbelief or their disbelief. This is called “lack of faith” in this translation; but it's not a lack as, for example, Mother Hubbard going to her cupboard and finding it bare. It's not that kind of lack. It's not the kind of lack you experience when you run out of time or when you run out of money. We all do that from time to time. It's not that kind of lack. **This lack is a deliberate refusal to believe, to trust, to go along with the message that Jesus brings**, the message which is, mind you, good news; and yet they don't want it. This is perplexing.

Why don't people want what is really good for them? Why do people push away what is to their best interests? This is what this gospel is really getting us to look at. Somehow or for some reason the people of Nazareth rejected the goodness that Jesus radiated and rejected the truth he spoke. Why are people so foolish? Well, whatever the answer, **that very foolishness continues to our own day.** Sometimes we are part of that foolishness. Partly it is the self-contempt I mentioned. When we don't believe in the goodness already within us, we push God away. Then **we put God to use to bring about our plans.** Perhaps that's what the people of Nazareth were thinking: God should help us do what we want, get what we want, get what we need or think we need.

But that's not God's plan. **God's plan is quite different.** Jesus is saying, look, **God has a vision for you greater than anything you could imagine, but you have to trust.** You have to let God in. **You have to let go of your ideas**, what we might call the “ego.” That's what psychologists call the self we create, the ego. It's all about our plans, our ideas, our values, what we want. St. Paul calls it the “flesh.” We have to let go of that **and live in God, which St. Paul calls “living in the Spirit.”** It's a real movement. That's what Jesus was trying to get people to do, move. They didn't want to. **Change can be hard.** But we see that Jesus did heal “a few,” it says; and **from time to time you do see Jesus taking initiative**, for example, the lame man by the pool of Bethesda. No one asked him to heal him. He didn't ask. Nobody asked. Jesus just went and did it for whatever reason; but usually, no. **Usually there has to be this active receptivity of trust**, of wanting what God is offering. And that was lacking in Nazareth. And why? Because they thought he was just another local yokel.

So this gives us something to think about on two points. First of all: **Are we really open to what God wants for us?** I have heard more than once the testimony of an atheist. And it goes like this. They say, “Well, I tried prayer; it didn't work. I prayed, and nothing happened.” That is not faith. That's testing God. That's tempting God. In science it's all about testing, and it's good. **We can have all kinds of hypotheses about the world and test them, but God is not an hypothesis**, and God is not part of the world. It is not up to us to put God to the

test. That's got everything all wrong, and sometimes we can fall into that. **We can have the wrong attitude toward God.**

So the question is: **Are we really willing to accept God's plan for us, and believe that it is the greatest possible vision that there could be?** If we are willing, then we surrender our plans and purposes to God and open ourselves to what God is wanting to give us. This is what the people of Nazareth did not do, and it frustrated Jesus and made his work impossible. So what about today? What about us? Secondly: **Do we recognize that very often God talks to us in very simple ways through people we know very well, members of our family?** They can speak to us the word of God. **Friends, neighbors, we should not despise the counsel God gives us just because we know so well the person speaking.** Sometimes God uses the language of common sense without any signs and marvels to try to give us a very important message. Jesus said, "A prophet is not accepted in his own household or among his own kin." Can we change that?