

Mark 6:1 tells us, "Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples." Jesus goes home to Nazareth, His hometown. It's good to go home after you have been away. It's an added treat if you come home with a few good stories to tell. It's even better to come home and to find out that your good stories have gotten home ahead of you, and that your family and hometown folks are proud of you.

After healing the sick, calming the sea, casting out many demons, and even raising the dead, Jesus was greeted as a celebrity almost everywhere he went. Everywhere He went, at least on the Jewish side of the lake, the crowds ran out to greet Him and they hung on every word He spoke. Surely, it would be even better to go home. Surely, the people of His hometown would feel good about Him and would take pride in the fact that their hometown boy had done such wonderful things. Perhaps there would be palm branches in the streets, a tickertape parade, a feast in His honor!

Mark 6:2-4 tell us what happened when Jesus arrived home. Mark says: "When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." **This is very sad.**

What is interesting in this passage is that Jesus is really just as impressive at home as anywhere else. The people recognized the power of His preaching. They acknowledged and were awed by His wisdom. They accepted as fact that He has performed miracles. The only problem was that He was regarded as one of them, and they could not believe that one of their own could attain to such heights legitimately. When they rejected Jesus, they were rejecting themselves.

The people of Nazareth were warped in their thinking and irrational in their behavior toward Jesus. Mark says, "they took offense at him." Their warped thinking and irrational behavior also limited what they could receive. Mark 6:5-6 report, "He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few

sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village."

There are several important things we can gather from verses 5 & 6. **The first is that our faith and our receptiveness to God's activity among us matters.** Jesus, in Himself and in His relationship with His heavenly Father, and in His possession of the Holy Spirit, was not lacking for spiritual power or authority. There was as much potential for Nazareth as for anywhere else. The lack was not in Jesus, but God has limited Himself in one very real way. It's not that He can't, but generally speaking, He will not intervene on our behalf without our permission and without our faith.

When God intervenes on our behalf, God wants us to know and all the world to know where the power comes from and where the glory belongs. That's why He requires our faith in Him and our prayers in Jesus' name to release His wonder working power. He desires to draw us and others into a deep intimate relationship with Himself and He desires that His name be honored among all men. Our faith and receptiveness to God's activity among us matters. **Faith matters.**

A second thing we learn from Mark 6:5-6, is that healing the sick is among the easiest things for the Lord to accomplish. Even when He could not do any big miracles in Nazareth, he was still able to lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them. This tells me that we should never be hesitant about praying for the sick or afraid of laying on hands and anointing with oil for the healing of the sick. God will often provide healing for the sick even when our confidence is low and our faith is weak. We should not be afraid to pray for the sick.

The third thing we learn in these verses is that if we choose not to allow the Lord the work His miracles among us, He will take them elsewhere. He will not minister where He is not wanted; He will not give miracles where there is no faith to receive them. Mark 6:6 says, "And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village." **The Lord will not stay where the Lord is not wanted.**

Mark 6:1-6 tell the story of Jesus response' to the rejection He experienced in His hometown of Nazareth. Their lack of faith frustrated His desire to do mighty works among them, although He was still able to heal a few of their sick. But, overall, their

lack of faith had tragic results for them; Jesus didn't stay where He wasn't wanted. He moved on to more fertile mission fields.

As we shift our attention now to the second half of our Scripture passage this morning, it seems to me that verses 7-13 flow from and are intimately connected to verses 1-6. If we stop to think about this very long, it might occur to us to wonder about the thoughts and feelings of Jesus' disciples regarding Jesus' rejection at Nazareth. Were they disappointed, angry, depressed, incredulous? Or, were they perhaps thinking that Jesus was losing his edge, that His ability to do mighty works was fading? Well, whatever they may have been thinking or feeling, Jesus didn't let them flounder very long. Instead, He uses the Nazareth experience as an object lesson. It's like Jesus was saying, **"Ok guys, this is how we deal with rejection; this is what we do when the going gets tough."**

Mark 6:7-11 say: "Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

I believe the followers of Jesus are still being sent out to battle evil and to bring to others the Good News of God's love in Christ. I also believe the instructions He gave to the Twelve offer several important principles for our consideration.

#1, when we battle evil and seek to share the gospel with others, we should always have a partner. Jesus sent them out two by two because two are better than one. We need to support one another in ministry. We need to pray for one another and to protect one another from the tricks of the enemy. We need someone to watch our back and someone to corroborate our spiritual stories. **We need a partner.**

#2, when we go out to battle evil and share Christ with others, we need to go in the authority of the Lord. The call, commission, and authority come from Him, "He gave them authority." If we seek to do kingdom work in our own strength or by our own authority, we doom that work to failure. We need the direction

and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's mission. **We need to go in His authority.**

#3, when we go out to battle evil and share Christ with others, we need to learn dependency on the Lord's provision. The disciples were sent out with sandals and their walking sticks, but they were forbidden to take bread, bag, money, or even an extra tunic. Now we know that God does not always call us to this level of poverty. Even Jesus and His disciples usually carried some food and a money bag; we know about the money bag because Judas was accused of stealing from it. The apostle Paul talked about earning his own living so as not to be a burden on others. But the instructions in Mark 6:7-11 are a training exercise. Above and beyond what we can do for ourselves, God is able to supply all our needs when we are seeking to obey Him. We must learn to rely on Him. **We need to learn that we can depend on the Lord's provision while we are engaged in the Lord's mission.**

#4, when we go out on kingdom business, we can also expect to receive help from servants of God outside of our immediate fellowship. When God sends us out we can count on the fact that He always goes ahead of us and that He places agents, both human and angelic, in strategic places to help us.

Several weeks ago I was in the office thinking about the vision and future story of our church, and one of the things that kept coming to me was the conviction that we need to be more outwardly focused and somehow more involved in reaching our community for Christ. While I was thinking about that, Kate Prescott came to my office door. It so happens that Kate has pioneered a ministry to the children and families who live at Evergreen Manor near Eldorado. She came to our office to see if we would be willing to do a similar ministry at Fairview Hills. She even volunteered to write a letter to the manager at Fairview Hills to see if they would open their doors to us. Suspecting that this was a God thing, I said, "Go for it!"

It wasn't long until I received a call from the Fairview Hills office inviting us to come and explain what we might have in mind. It so happened that Kate was off work the day of the meeting and agreed to go with me. When I went to pick up Kate for the meeting she said she was nervous about the meeting. I prayed for us and told Kate that if this was what God wanted, He would make a way. Do you know who the person in charge of

the Fairview Hills office just happens to be? I had no idea, but Eleanor Kiser's granddaughter Amy Myers is the manager at Fairview Hills, and she couldn't have been sweeter. At this point we have a green light to demonstrate God's love at Fairview Hills. **When we go out in His name, God will send His helpers ahead of us.**

#5, The final principle we learn from these verses is what I call freedom from the success syndrome. The sad truth is that not everyone will be open to the message of Christ. Jesus encountered resistance in His own hometown and elsewhere, and His disciples would encounter resistance also. Sometimes their ministry would be rejected and they would be abused, but Jesus' word to them and to us is clear. "Shake the dust off your feet." In other words, don't let failure or rejection in one place or in one instance hold you back from ministry in another. Shake the dust off and stay faithful to your calling. **You will reap a harvest if you do not give up.**

Frankly, I don't know what will happen to me or to the ministry of our church as we move further into the 21st century. Our church may get bigger or smaller. Finances may enable us to continue and expand or a lack of giving may choke off ministry. Some people may receive our ministry gladly while others may reject it. I don't know what to expect. I do know this: God wants us to be faithful to the calling we have received from Him. He wants us to be a Church of God, a people wholly devoted to Him. He wants us to love one another deeply. He wants us to reach out to others in the authority and power of the Holy Spirit. I don't know what will happen, but I believe if we are open to His living presence among us and if we are faithful, we will be blessed, and what's even more important we will be a blessing to others.

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Faith to Keep Going

When the Going Is Tough

Mark 6:1-13

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