

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Ordinary Time

Feb. 3, 2021

Mark 6:1-6

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The Rememberings at our funeral liturgies are always a cause of astonishment to me – not unlike these hometown observers of Jesus in the synagogue of the today's Gospel. Sisters, who I thought I knew, in the review and relating of their lives and ministries makes me realize I didn't have a clue about the richness of all that they accomplished, let alone the exquisite beauty in all their giftedness.

The witness of the many people who were influenced and touched by their lives is always further amazing. I certainly am unaware!

This Gospel selection today reveals the same unawareness of Jesus or worse, preferred blindness.

We could put some titles to this reading:

“Overcoming Familiarity” or “The Extraordinary in the Ordinary” or “A Prophet Among Us??”

Looking at the end-words of these suggestions: Familiar, Ordinary, Among Us?? will reveal that the neighbors of Jesus thought that they knew him quite well. He was like them: a small-town person from a specific family with a specific work. He attended synagogue with them, was around and about – like them.

He is an ordinary person – like them – and should be doing ordinary things. In other words, they had put Jesus and everything about him “in a box” limiting anything outside of their world of opinion and predictability.

What was happening that day in their midst did not fit. Even their astonishment did not break through their set opinion, their closed box. So, the alternative was to reject what they saw and heard.

This is a familiar tale even in our own day. A couple of examples: On an Indian reservation out West there was a high school graduate who did well and she went on to college, learning many new ways to be of service and to help transform the poverty she lived in as a child. When, with love and zeal, she returned to the reservation to begin her work, she encountered “the box” and the rejection of her own neighbors.

Another example from rural Michigan, a young man who loved farming studied agriculture at university. Returning home, he shared his learning and new technology with his parents. His father said, “No, we will do it the way we always have.” Again, the box.

We can look at our own world and see it happening on very large scales as well.

Looking at my titles of the Gospel again, this time, just the beginning words: “Overcoming”, “Discovering” and “Prophets.” Couldn’t the astonishment of the people in the synagogue that day opened their eyes to something different? Perhaps even transformative?

After all, astonishment can be the first step toward overcoming predictability of what they thought they knew of Jesus. They might have discovered something not only about Jesus, but even about themselves. Couldn’t they see that they were boxing themselves in as well? (When I find that someone has put me in a box, I want to protest, I am more than what you think about me!!)

The closing words of the Gospel have astonishment and amazement on Jesus’ part as well.

Don’t they know that being ordinary does not exclude the extraordinary? How can they turn away, resist this evidence of God’s power? That if God works through him, could God not also work through them?

That is always so very apparent to me when we celebrate the lives and ministries of our sisters. I resolve every time to not wait for funerals to enlarge my curiosity, vision and appreciation.

We are infinitely more than what we think we know. We can transcend the narrow view. Lastly, this idea of “prophet:” One time I asked a group of fourth-graders what a prophet was.

Out of the blue came the answer: “When you are richer than when you started out.”

Not a bad definition as I got to thinking about it, although I had to straighten out what kind of prophet I was talking about. But still not a bad definition.

In the light of today’s story, the people were not richer, but indeed poorer, because they didn’t accept Jesus as a prophet among them. So this very sad line: “He could do no deed of power there.”

This was true for the young woman on the Indian reservation and the young man on his family farm.

It is not the case with us. We can transcend the narrow view. Our Constitutions (#2) say “we recognize the variety of gifts that enriches the community and furthers the Reign of God in multiple ways.” These gifts are the Spirit of Jesus in us. So, we rely on the Spirit in each of us and in ourselves as #16 so prophetically proclaims, “... to speak God’s word with boldness and to risk deeds our own hearts could never dream ...”

Let the prophets be honored among us. There is no doubt, we are richer than when we started out.