

Just Jesus
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Mark 6:1-13

“He’s not special. He’s just Jesus. And we know plenty of people like him.”

Whether it’s First-century Nazareth or Twenty-First Century Charlotte, we’ve heard it too many times before. God doesn’t work through people like you. God doesn’t dwell in the ordinary. And God certainly doesn’t show up in places like this.

And I can’t help but wonder, how spectacular does God have to be to get recognized? Why must God be forced to have the humility of Mother Theresa AND the flare of Beyoncé? (Don’t get me wrong, I think a God made in the image of Beyoncé would be fierce. Extremely fierce!!!). And why must God be rich, and powerful, and full of machismo? Let the Greeks have their Zeus.

What’s more important: God revealed in the image we desire, or God revealed in God’s true form? And the same goes for God’s agents. Do we need them to be spectacular? Or can they be like you and me?

Here’s what I love about today’s text: Jesus has a hometown. And that means he’s got a whole slew of people who have known him his whole life. They know he can tinker some, and that he’s a serviceable carpenter. His penmanship could stand some work, especially his cursive z’s. (But couldn’t everyone’s!). I know this firsthand because once, when we were in tenth grade, he let me copy his Latin homework – I could barely read it, and the translation was C-level as best!!! And he’s been known to over-cook his eggs. But he does makes good barbeque. He’s not much of a softball player, but he’ll play if you need an alternate. But man, his brother James, and his sister Susan, they sure were good ballplayers!!! He’s a good listener. Sometimes he’s asks tough questions. He loves his mama. He knows how to make a pair of sandals work for him. He picks great emojis when he texts. He’s a solid dude. You’d be pleased to call him friend, and not overly disappointed if he decided to get married to one of your kids – they could do worse!!!

But Son of God material? Probably not. God doesn’t dwell in Podunk towns like Nazareth. And God doesn’t work through people like Jesus, even if they are the nice, respectable ones from next door. I mean we saw him grow up. And we know his family. And they’re no different than you and me.

This morning, Jesus is forced to reckon with same thing that every human does – the struggle to escape the shackles of familiarity thrust upon us by those whom we know best. And the hesitancy to believe that God is just as present in the things we know, as in the things we don’t.

That’s not God. And that’s not God working through someone. That’s just Jesus.

And we’re told Jesus was able to heal a few folks, and spread some cheer the day he came to visit. But that’s about all, because people couldn’t look past their familiarity with him, and believe that God was doing extraordinary things through this very ordinary person. And in their haste to demand a spectacular God, they missed God’s spectacular acts.

But what about those who chose to believe he was more than just Jesus? I'm sure they had sisters and brothers, and sloppy penmanship, too. And the text doesn't tell us, but when he sent those twelve believers out into the world, surely they brushed past a few of their old stomping grounds, and encountered a few familiar faces, too. And just like Jesus, God worked through them, creating an ability to offer healing hands, and an ability to counteract evil forces. Some they encountered were blinded by familiarity – we've seen your story too many times. But others weren't. They recognized God at work, and they were greeted with God's transforming presence and love.

Here's what I think today's text is trying to tell us. God is spectacular and God is mysterious. But God doesn't always appear in spectacular and mysterious ways. We live in a world that tells us every love story is a Hollywood Rom-Com, and every calling is a Damascus Road moment, and every act of God is newsworthy. And to be sure, sometimes the spectacular occurs. But most times, it's subtle.

God's is present in silence. And God's call is revealed by the steady drip, drip, dripping of familiar voices of affirmation and love. And God's power is displayed in acts of kindness offered over and over and over again. And one day, the familiar face of a person raised by the people of an ordinary village, emerges as one cloaked in the collective wisdom, love, and power of God's people.

When we know children from birth, we don't see the gradual change from infant to child to adult. They may be 25-years old, and we still see them as born yesterday. And if we are exposed daily to a loving parent or sibling or spouse or friend, we may never fully realize how transformative they are, because we don't receive them as one dose. We receive them over a lifetime.

I'm not sure the people of Nazareth were able to fully grasp Jesus in their midst. And I think the question for us today is: Are we, the people of Sardis, able to fully grasp Jesus in our midst?

We know one another. And maybe because we know one another well, there's a little less luster to our coats – Good people are here. But Jesus, I think not.

Well don't you go believing that for a second. That man in Nazareth was more than just Jesus. And the people that fill this place are more than just Sardis. He and We are of God. And no matter how familiar we get, no matter how ordinary we may seem, God is poised to use us in transformative ways. Thank God for familiar people and ordinary ways. And thank God that Jesus was more than just Jesus, and Sardis is more than just Sardis!!!

And a closing thought as we prepare for Communion. It's a familiar ritual. And if we're not careful, we can think that It's just a ritual, and just bread, and just wine, and just another item in the worship guide.

Well, I always like to think of the last supper as the PB&J (Peanut Butter and Jelly!) of its time. Jesus took what he had, and he offered it willingly to his friends.

I couldn't help but wonder, have you ever thought it's just a PB&J? I've had at least ten thousand in my lifetime, and I'm sure I thought that at least once or twice in grammar school. But as I give it more thought, my mind is flooded with images: little PB&Js wrapped with care in wax paper; and hands who have made them – women and men who have loved me dearly; and people who cut the crust off to make 'em fancy; and a youth-trip chaperone who happily ate two heels of the loaf 'cause that's all that was left; and lunch tables that offered respite after tests, or recess, or after swimming at the beach; or like three weeks ago, when Jacqueline and I each had one for the first time in forever and thought – this

is AMAZING; or making one for my little girl; or people who ask, “would you rather have strawberry jelly instead, or do you need gluten-free bread?”; or how something as simple as a sandwich can break down so many barriers.

What we celebrate today, and every Sunday, is not just Communion. We celebrate that Communion is just. At a table, we share ourselves, and we share our belief that God can join us together in the simple act of hospitality. And we celebrate that something as familiar as a meal, something familiar like Jesus, can transform this ordinary world into the one God calls us to help bring about.

He wasn't just Jesus. And we aren't just Sardis. And this isn't just a table.

Thanks be to God!