

Messiah on His Own Terms  
Mark 6:1-13  
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 4, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, “And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This morning’s text seems a strange reading; it would seem to imply Jesus has “met his match”... that there’s something among men that can actually prevent him from doing his work... almost as if Jesus has a “kryptonite” of sorts, that weakens him and renders him powerless. Of course, if such were the case, the “kryptonite” would be more powerful and, thus, by definition, it would be god over God, which can’t be so.

All the previous texts leading up to this show Christ’s divine authority and power: the calming of the storms, the casting out of demons, the healing of the woman ill for 12 years, the raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead. There can simply be no mistaking that there in those places Jesus was in complete control, proving himself repeatedly to be God in the flesh, the Messiah incarnate promised from of old.

But that was *there*. Now, our text begins,

*He went away from there and came to his hometown (Nazareth). And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?" Is not this the carpenter?"... And they took offense at him.*

Almost identical questions were asked of him in *Capernaum* early in Mark's gospel, but with nearly opposite results: they believed in Him, and He went about doing all types of miracles to support the divine claims of his teaching. Here in Nazareth, his preaching is rejected, and, thus, no miracles. But, notice the pattern is always the same: teaching first, miracles second. Where the teaching is believed, miracles are performed. Where the teaching is rejected, no miracles are performed.

And this helps us understand what Mark means when he says of Jesus, "And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief." In other words, it's not that Jesus *couldn't* work, or lost his power and authority to work; it's that the teaching always precedes the miracles. And, where the teaching is rejected, why would the Lord bless those who have rejected it? So, yes, strictly speaking, "He could not" do the miracles – why? – not because he wasn't divinely able or because

their faithlessness acted as kryptonite, but because he was not about to bless those who rejected him in such stubborn unbelief.

This role between faith and Christ's willingness to work is important to understand rightly. For, if we misinterpret this, we mistakenly believe that faith *makes* the miracle (or "faith makes the holy thing," aka: "the sacrament")... we then take another erroneous step to say that faith makes the reality, so that – apart from faith – the things of God aren't real, but faith merely makes them up and it's all a bunch of "kool-aid drinking" among the believers. That's how the cynical world wants to interpret the workings of the Christ – that none of it is *objectively* true, but it's only considered "true" by those who believe it, so that "wink, wink, nudge, nudge" – those foolish Christians *think* it's true because of their collective "kool-aid drinking," – where the more objectively-minded and clear-thinking cynic *\*knows\** it really was never true in the first place.

But that's not what the Scriptures mean when they record that Jesus only does miracles where faith is present. We must point out and always keep in mind the relationship between his Word and the miracles, his teaching and the Sacraments. The Word comes first, the miracles come second. To those who believe the proclamation of His divine Word, He objectively and truly blesses them with his continued outpouring of divine acts

and gifts the world itself can never benefit from. To those who refuse his Word, He will not then shower them with spiritual blessings!

Sadly, we may use all too many Christian church bodies as example: they twist and pervert the Word and the teaching; they reinterpret it into false gospels and false promises, false teachings that put all the focus on them and their dedication to God. And, because they want the honor to be on them, they refuse to see the honor of Christ's sacramental works among them. And, if they will refuse his promises and teaching about these sacraments of Baptism, Absolution, the Supper – if they refuse the gift and even deny their need for it or their benefit from the gift – then he will refuse them the sacraments. By his own holy standards, he cannot work in his Sacraments where the church mocks his Words and promises regarding those sacraments. He is not “for you” in Baptism or the Supper where the gathered assembly has no faith in them. To be sure, He is “for the child” in the Baptism – it is most certainly valid and true – but where the child is quickly taught to reject the promise, then no benefit can remain from that baptismal work for the unbelieving. Indeed, how sad, but how vitally important, to maintain the tragic divisions of denominational teaching within the Church – as Paul admits, “There must be divisions among you, that those who are genuine

may be recognized” – that we may be able to hold steadfastly to the incarnate Christ’s teaching and sacramental blessings.

In other words, the Messiah is Messiah on *his* terms, not on yours. You cannot take by force the blessings you want, the way you want them, and then throw out the rest of the teaching you don’t want. You cannot cherry-pick the Words of the Messiah and say, “I will listen to these words, but not believe those words.” He either has **all** authority in heaven and earth, as He claims, or He has **none**. And that means, he is either Lord over life and death, freely bestowing upon you all the rich inheritance he has promised his miraculous sacraments will bestow, or he can give you nothing and is worthless for you.

And it all depends upon the preaching of his Word as it points to his cruciform work as Messiah. It all depends upon the authority and power and wisdom of His Word (as Paul says, the preaching of Christ crucified is the power of God and wisdom of God)... which, if we read the text carefully, even the cynics in his hometown synagogue acknowledged that Christ’s word was true, wise and authoritative... they simply refused to believe He – the carpenter’s boy they watched grow up – was Lord over them. As the saying goes, “familiarity breeds contempt.”

And that’s your temptation, too, isn’t it? That you become *familiar* with the preaching of Christ, and thus itching ears seek

some other gospel; and you begin to think it's within your right to cherry-pick from God's Word and to decide what part of it is useful for your daily life and what part can be thrown away. Yes, we begin to listen to the Word as if "it better match up to what I want it to say and what honor I want to give it, and what authority I want to permit it in my daily life... and, as long as I so graciously give it a place in my life, then the divine acts and miracles and sacraments better follow!"

But Christ is Christ on his terms, not on yours. He did not go to the cross because he thought your itching ears would enjoy hearing that gospel. He went to the cross because that was *His* plan, not yours. Because it captured the Father's heart toward sinners, not sinners' hearts toward the Father. Because it was *God's* plan of reconciliation toward those He loved, not because it was *your* plan and picture of love toward God.

Yes, if the Gospel was based on your desire, Jesus would not be the Christ... and He would not have sealed your salvation as He did. For, before He called you to turn from your ways, you had no interest in such things. And even his preaching makes that very clear: Look at the second half of our text and how the focus of his preaching is not on trying to winsomely woo you into the Christian faith. His is no sales pitch, nor a gimmicky gospel trying to win your approval. Rather, he sends out the twelve for one

reason – to proclaim that people should repent: “And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them,” He commanded the twelve! The Messiah is Messiah on his terms, not on yours.

But, his call to repentance is no bludgeoning by a bitter and angry God; it is a call to benefit from the fact that Messiah has sealed salvation on His terms, because your terms would never seal it. Thus, repent and despair of your desire to retain your own personal honor, independence from God, your desire for “capital-M Me” to be your own god. For where God is *not* at work, it’s only because the faithless refuse to believe His preaching. What did St Paul tell the Corinthians?: “We have put no obstacle in your way... We have spoken freely to you. Our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but **you are restricted in your own affections**. In return, widen your hearts also.” In other words, “Repent; you are not restricted by us “judging” you; you are restricted by your unwillingness to repent before the holy God.”

Isn’t that also what John the Baptist proclaimed, a baptism of repentance, preparing the way by saying, “One comes after me who is mightier than I” – in other words, “the Messiah comes on

his own terms.” And how did Jesus come, but proclaiming,  
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

This proclamation is exactly what we should expect, for in our Old Testament reading God describes the **people** He comes to save:

“nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are also impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them: ‘Thus says the Lord God’.”

Notice what the prophet is to say to them: “This is the Word of the Lord – like it or not; *His Word* is authoritative, powerful, worthy of all honor.” But when that Word is brought into the midst of a stubborn, rebellious people, will there not be a clash of wills, a skirmish for supremacy... and some will be rescued from their slavery to Capital-M Me, and others will have to be shaken off the foot, the casualties of a dirty, but necessary struggle.

But let us not paint the picture incorrectly, as if the Lord takes you by **force**. Not remotely. He takes you by **faith**... faith created by that very authoritative and powerful and honorable Word that proclaims the truth of your sin and the truth of your Savior, and calls to you “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand... to be freely given to all who believe in the rescue Christ has secured for you... the rescue from yourself... the rescue from ‘capital M - Me.’” Yes, truly, that call to repentance is a call to

salvation. To repent may at first seem like “crying uncle” at the foot of an imposing force, but more truly, we learn it is acknowledging that *He* is God, and – thanks be to that God! – for He is gracious. His Word of mercy and compassion and forgiveness is true, so that our Introit says, “Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” That’s repentance, isn’t it! To take refuge in God and the Christ he has sent... to despair of my own stubborn refusal to acknowledge the authority, wisdom, and honor of Christ to be Messiah on his own terms... to despair of such stubbornness and to see that this Messiah is trustworthy and true, and all that He is promised is so. So that, to the penitent, to those who have believed on His name, he carries out the miracles and sacraments by which He gives them the right to become children of God, born not of flesh or of the will of man, but born of the will of God in that miraculous, sacramental gift of Baptism... a life sustained and kept and safeguarded in the miraculous, sacramental gift of the Supper. In these gifts, Christ promises to work, where faith in his Word is found and where people gather around the font and altar with the promises of the pulpit still ringing in their ears, and they can appeal to Him and say, “You have promised it in your good and holy Word! Make it so among us now! Lord, have mercy, save, forgive, and strengthen us... for we live by that proclamation: ‘Thus says the Lord God.’”

Friends, cherish the joy and mercy and compassion tucked right behind these words: “So [the twelve] went out and proclaimed that people should repent.” Yes, friends, you should repent. Not as if God is bludgeoning you upside the head, for he calls you to repent precisely because the kingdom of heaven is at hand... the kingdom of grace is **freely** yours because of Christ! However, neither should that free grace be an excuse to merely pay lip service to repentance, as if this Gospel is to be safeguarded merely as the best currently available in the “flea market of false gospels.”

Christ is Christ on his own terms; in the face of that, the wise man will repent and recognize his need for the Christ. And to all who, having heard the Word, confess their need and rejoice in their Lord, Christ will carry out the mysterious divine acts of the miracles he has promised: “This is my body, for you. This is my blood, for you... for the forgiveness of your sins.” That is the power, authority, wisdom, indeed the mighty work of heaven on earth... of the Christ in your presence.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

Calvary Lutheran Church  
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