

Sunday, July 4, 2021

Our gospel reading contains two parts, the story of Jesus amazed by the unbelief of his home community, and the story of the disciples being sent out on their own.

One theme that is present in both stories is the idea of Welcome... We have Jesus in his own hometown, they are judgmental of him, and he can do no deeds of power... I guess you could say he was welcomed there, but not accepted... And we have the disciples sent out on their own mission trips with absolutely nothing at all, to see how they would be welcomed...

Welcoming is a value we all share. In fact, a lot of us have little signs in our home or door mats that say "Welcome." We want people to feel at ease when they come over. And the same thing with church, we want people to feel like this is a place where they can be comfortable and belong.

For me, welcoming is a posture, it is an openness to be with someone, without judgment, or any preconceived ideas. Because of this, sometimes it's easier to extend a welcome to someone we **don't** know than it is to extend a welcome someone we **do** know.

Quick story... And this is about my old neighborhood in Austin...

We were all a little motorcycle crazy... Tim across the street had an amazing man-cave and I loved going over there to have a beer, talk about music and motorcycles... Tim loved Indian motorcycles. He had three of them, always polished and on display. Tim lived for motorcycles!

In the house immediately east of me, was Art and he loved Harleys. In the house immediately west side of me was Willie and he had Hondas. Well, it wasn't too

long after living in that neighborhood that I got a Suzuki dl650a, a v-strom... And isn't it amazing how powerful coveting is?

For the most part, my Austin neighbors got along well. But, I'd walk over to yak with Tim and he'd tell me that Art is a poser; someone who pretends to be a biker, he'd tell me "he doesn't know what he's talking about." And besides that, "he needs to cut his grass." And not only that, "his dog barks too much..."

Can you see where this is going? There was a little rivalry going on and lots of judgment... And it wasn't very subtle... Art wasn't really welcome at Tim's place... And Art knew it... It was kind of a strain in the neighborhood.

We not only covet belongings, we also covet one another's skills, status and attention. The past couple of weeks, I've been reading a biography of Jimi Hendrix. And I have this love/hate thing going on with him.

I love what he did as far as being an innovative guitarist at that time in history. But as I read his story, I find myself being incredibly judgmental. I find myself saying, "Well, that sure wasn't a good idea!" Interesting, how we compare ourselves to others... Even people who have passed away decades ago!

And frankly this is what celebrity is... It's that love / hate relationship... We all want to be like the movie stars or the athletes, but we're not, and so we're a little jealous and we can be judgmental.

And this is where we encounter Jesus this morning in his home town... The locals all know he's something of a celebrity, they all agree he has done some wonderful things, and they're a little jealous and judgmental, and consequently they take offense at him.

Can you imagine, they're probably saying things like, "Sure, He's a great teacher, but he should be spending more time with his family..." And instead of going to him for healing, they looked for his faults; they sat in judgment of him. They were not very welcoming!

And so, I wonder, if the reason why Jesus doesn't do great deeds of power in his hometown is not so much about the strength of his divinity, as much as it has to do, with us, with humanity and how easily we become judgmental and take offense at one another.

In the body of Christ, we are called to love **everyone**, to be welcoming to **everyone**... And that is difficult...

Being in a posture to welcome puts us in a position to be vulnerable. And that takes some courage and wisdom. Welcoming is opening our lives to change because of what we might experience.

Jesus sends the disciples out, and directly instructs them not to take anything at all... They are completely vulnerable! And the text says that "They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them."

In their vulnerability, lives were changed and healing happened... Vulnerability does not come easy for us. We become vulnerable to one another when we suspend our judgments and listen to one another. And listen so deeply, that in fact we find ourselves changing because of what we hear.

We might not change our minds about opinions, but we might change our hearts. We might find empathy for one another... And we're not called to agree with one another; we are called to love one other. Do you see the difference?

And the good news today is that in welcoming, in the listening and loving one another, transformation happens. The posture of welcome is a posture to change... to be invited into a new way of love-- to be a new creation, and transformed into the larger body of Christ. And frankly I believe it, because I've seen it.

Every time I see people who are different from one another, and listening and working together, I know that hearts are changed... Amen...