

**“Listening to Your Own Prophetic Voice”**  
**Mark 6:1-13**

**Ben Johnston-Krase**  
**July 5, 2009**

*Jesus came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.*

*Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.’ So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

Good to be back in Racine, especially this past weekend. What a wonderful 4<sup>th</sup> of July – great weather, quite a parade yesterday!

Last week I was back in Austin, Texas, where I served a church for five years before coming here. Long before I’d left, I’d agreed to do a wedding, which was last week on Friday. Of course, when I’d said “yes” to this wedding and while it was being planned, no one knew that Austin would be the victim of some record-breaking temperatures last week. The service was outside, as was the reception, and the temperature was 105 degrees and humid!

Still, the wedding was beautiful and meaningful and full of tender moments, as most weddings are. The bride and groom were very, very hot—but happy. Like most brides and grooms, they were captivated by each other and captivated by their day—this day that they had been planning for months and months. One of the things I always do at weddings is to have the couple turn and face the congregation—not at the end of the service, but at the beginning. I invite them to simply take a moment, turn around, and look at everybody who is present, and I say to them something like this: “Here is much of your life thus far. Take a look. These are the souls who have laughed and cried and celebrated and shared it all with you.” It’s at that moment that I ask the entire congregation to continue to support and nurture the couple as they move into marriage.

I’m struck this morning as we look at our story from Mark’s gospel how Jesus has found himself in a similar situation. Not a wedding, really, but the passage begins by telling us that Jesus came into his home town. A bit of a local celebrity at this point, Jesus is. After all, he’d be traveling through the surrounding countryside, performing miracles here and there. No doubt the buzz in his home town of Nazareth was that he was making quite a name for himself. “Have you heard

about Joseph and Mary's boy, Jesus?" they'd say to each other at the market and at PTA meetings. And then, at this point in his ministry, Jesus and his disciples find themselves coming through his old stomping grounds. Naturally, the locals all want to see him. "Is this the same Jesus we knew as a kid?" "This Jesus—the one everybody's talking about—is he the same one who used to catch frogs in the creek behind our house?"

So when Jesus goes to teach in his home synagogue, everyone is there. His family, his friends and their families, his best friends, his 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, his little league coach—everyone is there wondering, perhaps, if this will be the "same Jesus."

At the beginning of the service that morning, someone could have said to Jesus, "Here is much of your life thus far. Take a look. These are the souls who have laughed and cried and celebrated and shared it all with you."

Jesus teaches in that synagogue, and everyone is astounded. He is Jesus, after all. But whereas the folks over in Cana couldn't get enough of him, this hometown crowd isn't so sure. They say, "Where did you come up with this stuff, Jesus? What are you now, the 'Son of God'? Please!" The line that gets me is this one—the people in the crowd ask, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" In other words, "Hey, whoa, whoa, whoa, Jesus—this whole "Blessed are the meek" act might play well two towns down the road, but we know you. You're no rabbi, and you're certainly no Messiah. Time for a reality check, Jesus, ol' buddy ol' pal—you're *a carpenter*."

It's sad but true. Sometimes the people who think they know you best are the ones who put the most limitations on who you might become. Sometimes the hometown crowd can't be your best group of fans—not because they don't love you, but because they think they know you. And even if you're Jesus Christ, you can't measure down to their expectations.

The title of this sermon today, however, is "Listening to *Your Own* Prophetic Voice." One of the things that interests me is the way in which we as human beings internalize the expectations of those around us. And here's something I wonder about Jesus. I wonder if he was a *good* carpenter. I mean, I guess on one hand we could suppose that if God's going to try his hand at carpentry, it's going to be pretty decent stuff, right? Wouldn't it stand to reason that Jesus' extended family, his mentors, and his friends pretty much saw his future making tables and chairs?

So then I wonder what happened the day that Jesus shared the news with them. "Hey guys, I've got a little announcement to share. I'm giving up carpentry. What I'm going to do is I'm going to go over to the river Jordan, I'm going to get baptized by that John the Baptists everyone's been hearing so much about, and then I'm pretty much going to travel for awhile, do some teaching, make my way down to Jerusalem..."

Can you imagine? "Yeah, right. Funny joke, Jesus—very funny. You almost had us there!" And if he were anybody else, he might have said at that moment, "You know, you're right. I don't know what got into me. After all, I'm a good carpenter. Why would I give that up?"

Lewis Smedes once wrote, “You are deep, unfathomably deep. You cannot be a shallow person; God does not make shallow people. You can, if you choose, close your own mind to the depths within you. But you cannot be shallow.”

Have you ever done that? Have you ever closed your own mind to the depths within you? Have you ever refused or been unable to hear the voice deep inside of you telling you who you really are and who you might become?

The Bible is full of faithful people who actively close their minds to the depths within them, claiming they don’t have what it takes to do what God calls them to do. After hearing God’s call, Moses practically falls all over himself with excuses and inadequacies. He asks God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” and says “they will not believe me or listen to my voice” and then he tries, “oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” And even though God keeps insisting that Moses is the right man for the job, he says, “Oh my Lord, send I pray some other person.”

The prophets in the Old Testament, ironically, often fail to hear their own prophetic voices. Jeremiah cries to God, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak for I am only a youth.” And when Isaiah gets the call, he complains, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips.”

I’m sure you’ve noticed that this summer, I’ve added a little something to our worship bulletin. “First Thoughts”—a few words to simply read to yourself as we gather or during some other moment in worship—some thoughts that will hopefully enhance our sense of what God is doing in our midst. Today our “First Thoughts” come from the mind of Marianne Williamson. She reminds us, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?” Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

I am fueled by that sentiment, and I hope you are too. I think it speaks to two realities of what it means to be a church:

The first is that God’s light is in each of us. Every one of us has a measure of God’s gifted light in us—helping us know truth, guiding us to do what God wants us to do. It’s the prophetic voice in us, giving us God’s sense of directions in our lives.

The second reality is this: part of the business of being a church family is to cultivate a place where we celebrate the prophetic voice in each other—where we listen for and affirm the ways that God is moving us to think differently and creatively about our lives.

That's a fun way to think about church, isn't it? That God's light is in each of us. So therefore, we don't come to church *so that we can experience God*. Rather, we come to church because we're experiencing God *all the time*—and church becomes the family of faith where we make sense out of that experience, where we celebrate God's prophetic voice working inside of us, calling us to be more wonderfully ourselves—the people God wants us to be.

There is a Hasidic tale about Rabbi Zusya. Late in his life, he said, “In the coming world, they will not ask me: ‘Why were you not Moses?’ They will ask me: ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”

In the next life, no one will ask you why you weren't Moses. Or Jesus or Paul or Peter. No one will ask you why you weren't Mother Teresa or Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King Jr. No one will ask you why you weren't your hero or your mentor or your teacher or your pastor. But perhaps someone will ask you why you weren't yourself.

Friends, let us listen more openly and intently to God's prophetic voice within each of us. Guiding us and giving our lives direction. Amen.