

Rev. Jan R. Burnett  
First United Methodist Church  
Denison, Iowa  
July 05, 2015  
Mark 6:1-13

## Hometown Unwelcome!

Good morning, I'm Jan Burnett and I am your new pastor. I am excited to be living in Denison and to be serving this community of faith as we share Good News of Jesus Christ. I am looking forward to working with you and am grateful for the hospitality I have already received from you. Thank you.

As you are aware, I just moved into the parsonage at 2101 6<sup>th</sup> Ave. N. here in Denison. That reminds me of my funniest "preacher story" ever. The moving van had unloaded all my belongings on Thursday late afternoon and boxes were everywhere. Friday morning, I was to meet the church secretary at 8:00 a.m. to give her the bulletin materials. It was about 7:30 and I was getting ready to go to the office when my little dog, Kirby, started barking. I thought, "Oh my goodness, I almost forgot to feed the dog." I was all dressed except for my dress (I was in my slip) and decided to step into the attached garage to find the dog food. My dog followed me into the garage, swished his tail against the door and the door closed hard. I suddenly realized I was locked out of the house and was standing there in my slip. I started looking through the boxes in the garage and found a black garbage bag. I made two holes for my arms and one for my head and put it on. I kept a car key on a magnet under the car, so I got the key, opened the garage door and drove over to the church. I pulled up under the canopy and waited for the secretary to arrive. A car

started to pull into the church driveway and I thought no way am I going to meet my first parishioners dressed in a garbage bag. So I pulled out of the driveway and circled the block until I saw the secretary pull into the church parking lot. I then drove under the canopy to meet her. She took one look at me in the car and said, “WOW, Pastor Pete and I usually come to work pretty casual on Friday’s, but that is ridiculous! She said, I bet you are locked out of the house. She then brought me a key. I told her I would be right back.

When I got back to the office, we began working on the bulletin and every now and then she would giggle. I knew this wasn’t going to keep, so the first Sunday morning I introduced myself and shared my funny preacher story with the congregation. Following the service I stood in the back of the sanctuary to shake hands and greet people. Over half of the congregation said, “Don’t tell anyone else but I used to serve on the Board of Trustees. And I want you to know that if that ever happens again, there is a parsonage key in the bush on the North side of the garage.” Following the service I went home to check and sure enough – I found the key in the bush.

The next day, Monday, I went to the post office and the postmaster came around in front of his desk, introduced himself to me and said, “I hear you come to work pretty casual on Fridays!”

The following week I had a meeting in Des Moines at the Conference Office. I went into the building, pressed the elevator button, the doors opened and there stood the Bishop. He said, “Good morning, Pastor. That’s really funny what happened to you on your first day at the church. You need to write that story and publish it a preacher’s magazine. It’s a great story!” It wasn’t long before I got a phone call from my former hometown pastor in Webster City. He was then serving as Conference Treasurer and had heard the story from the Bishop.

Speaking of home town pastors and a home town church, in our scripture for today, it's Friday night and Jesus was coming into his home town and home sanctuary. Let me tell you, the service that night was jammed. There wasn't room to park all the donkeys outside. The donkeys circled the parking lot looking for a stall but there were no parking stalls to be found. The parking lot was full. There were so many people in church that they ran out of bulletins. They put benches up in the center of the aisles. It was crowded, because the "local rabbi made good" was coming back to town.

Jesus came into the crowded service that night, and the worship service had an order much we like have on Sunday. They began with singing of songs, like we do, from their songbook, the book of Psalms. Then they had a prayer, like we do. Then they read from an Old Testament lesson, like we sometimes do, from the Law, the first five books of the Bible. And then the guest of honor was to choose from any passage in the Old Testament prophets. The passage he chose revealed his core values. So when Jesus chose to read from Isaiah 61, this passage symbolized his whole ministry. He chose the following passage out of Isaiah which would then become the basis of his sermon that night. Jesus read: "The Lord God has appointed me to preach good news to poor people, to heal the blind and sick, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This passage from Isaiah 61 clearly outlined the important values in Jesus' ministry. That is why he selected Isaiah 61. Jesus then closed the book. There was a looooong silence, and he said: "These words are fulfilled in your hearing." Then he preached a sermon on that text, and afterwards, the Gospel of Luke says that "everyone spoke well of him and wondered at his gracious words." Others exclaimed, "Where did he get all of this!" And still another said, "Where did he get so wise?"

But yet there were others who murmured and grumbled, “Isn’t this the son of Joseph who is sitting over there? Isn’t this simply the carpenter’s kid? And aren’t those his brothers standing there, Judas, Joses, and Simon? And aren’t those his sisters? He is just the common kid from Nazareth. You know, the kid who grazed our donkeys; who watered our oxen, who drew water from the well for us to drink. He is nothing but the carpenter’s kid. There is nothing too special about him.”

And pretty soon, according to the passage, “they took offense at him.” That is the key word of the text: offense. In Greek, it is “skandalon” from which we get the word, “scandal.” Scandal also means “stumbling block.” This is a key word, scandalon or stumbling block, and we will talk about it later in the sermon.

Boiling waters began to brew. Some people in the synagogue were thinking: “He could do all those miracles there in Capernaum but he can’t do any miracles here in Nazareth.” And Jesus said, “A prophet is not accepted in his own home. A prophet is not accepted in his own home congregation. A prophet is not accepted in his own hometown. The reason that I don’t do miracles here in Nazareth is because of your lack of faith.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus went onto to say, “The same happened to the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha. Elijah and Elisha could do no miracle in Israel because the people didn’t believe in in the power of God. Elijah and Elisha had to go elsewhere, outside the boundaries of Israel, outside the borders of Israel, to find true faith. Elijah went to Sidon to help a widow and Elisha went to Syria to heal the leper. These two prophets couldn’t find true faith in the Israelites; they had to go across the border to find true faith.”

And Jesus was amazed at their unbelief.

Jesus could have said,” I don’t see any true faith in this synagogue. You are more interested in “in doing religion” than doing justice. You are more interested in my popularity and publicity than in the poor, maimed, blind and lame. You are more interested in a religious show than showing compassion for the poor. Yes, you do not exhibit the power of faith in your lives.

And the people were mighty mad at Jesus. They were ticked off. They took deep offense at Jesus. They were mad at him. They were so offended by Jesus that according to the Gospel stories for today, they ran him out of the church. They ran him right up to the edge of a high cliff and tried to push him over the edge and kill him.

The congregational members had come in with such high expectations. Jesus was on a huge religious roll; the church was jammed; the parking lot was full; they ran out of bulletins, but by the end of the night, they were ready to kill him.

Jesus must have said something that really got on their nerves. What was it that Jesus said that offended them so deeply that in the Gospel of Luke, they took him up to a hilltop and tried to kill him? What did Jesus say that was so offensive? That is what I would like to try to get at in today’s sermon. The key word is “offended.” They were offended by Jesus! What was it that he said that was an offense, a stumbling block for them?

When Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1, that passage was about the Messiah. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor people.” The “me” in that sentence was the Messiah. Jesus was saying that he was none other than the long expected Messiah and that REALLY offended them.

The hometown folk couldn’t believe that one of their own children could actually be a prophet. Jesus was suggesting that he was even more

than a prophet. He was claiming that he was the long awaited Messiah, and the people weren't ready to accept him. "Come on. He watered our donkeys. He cleaned our yards. He grazed our donkeys. No way could he be a prophet. How can this Jesus-guy come back and be even more than a prophet, the Messiah? Not little Jesus of Nazareth. Not the little Jesus boy that we used to go fishing with and swimming with and hiking with. Not the little neighborhood boy who delivered our papers. How could God come in such a common and ordinary way as to come through Jesus of Nazareth? Jesus certainly doesn't measure up to our expectations of what it means to be a messiah."

The people there that day were offended by the Incarnation, that God actually became a human being. That was the scandal, the stumbling block.

The Incarnation: that God would come in the flesh of a man they knew, a man by the name of Jesus from the town of Nazareth  
And so what I am trying to suggest to you is that God consistently comes to us and talks to us in common and ordinary ways, so much so, that we often don't even hear the voice of God. Are we open to hearing God speak to us through our spouses, children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, members of our church family? Whose voice is God using to speak to you today?

Let us prepare for our time at the communion table by being open to hear the voice of God.