

Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

In last week's gospel Jesus goes home to read and to preach
and he seems to be a wild success.
His friends and neighbors are all abuzz.
They keep asking...
"Is not this Joseph's son?"
If there were a newspaper I imagine the headlines would have been...
"Local Boy Makes Good!"

Because you have to understand
Nothing much ever happened in Nazareth.
It was a small village in a remote land
it is a village on the road to someplace else more exciting.

And yet, today,
in this place where nothing much ever happened,
the people of Nazareth
heard the Word of Isaiah;
the Word of their Fathers,
fulfilled in their hearing.

And the people are excited...
They are seeing opportunity...
They are thinking that their local hero is going to put Nazareth on the map.
They are hoping that Jesus will perform miracles and bring prosperity and good fortune to their
little nothing town.
Because after all,
"Is not this Joseph's son?"

But then everything changes.
Because Jesus does not respond as the people had hoped,
And the crowd which just a couple verses earlier was praising Jesus is now ready to throw their
local hero over a cliff.

It seems that Jesus pushed his idea of who he was called to be
beyond the comfortable place of "Local Boy Makes Good".
Jesus pointed out that he was not there to make everyone happy,
to meet their expectations.
Jesus points out that he has been called to something else, something more.

I'll tell you when I first read the gospel for today and realized **this** was the gospel I would be
preaching my last sermon on as your Associate Pastor I thought...
REALLY???
Are you kidding me??

But then this gospel kept nagging at me...
This gospel kept whispering to me at night while I was trying to sleep
And I realized that it is no coincidence this is the reading for today...
Instead it's a God-incidence...

Jesus knows he cannot just say and do what people expect because how then will God's mission ever be fulfilled
Jesus knows he cannot just live in the past but must instead move beyond that into God's future
Jesus knows his calling is to fulfill God's plans... even if his hometown friends and neighbors get angry with him.

I am aware today that many of you are upset and hurt by my leaving.
I am aware that many of you would like me to just stay so that nothing has to change.
If I look up during one more service and watch Bonnie mouth to me "don't go!" or listen to person after person tell me that they don't want me to leave...
If I heard all that and just stayed....
Well then I wonder how God's mission would be continued in whatever place God is leading me to next?

In this story Jesus is being called to a future bigger than even he can imagine.
I think in some ways that is the calling to all of us as well.
Not just me because I'm leaving
But to each and every one of us.
For each of us here today I think the lesson begs us to ask the question,
What cliff are we willing to get dragged to before we too walk through the crowd and continue on our way?
Think about that...

When Jesus comes to create God's future, it's often at the expense of expectations rooted in the past.
God's future usually disturbs us because God's imagination is a lot bigger than ours.

The people of Nazareth wanted the chance to control Jesus
But that day in Nazareth,
Jesus reminded his friends and neighbors
that God's ways are not our ways.
Jesus reminded them that God's grace is not restrained by our fences
or controlled by our prayers.

When Jesus spoke that day in the synagogue of Nazareth,
he gave notice that his ministry
would embrace the stranger and include the outsider.
His message would confront as often as comfort.
His teaching would be sharp and pointed and sometimes it would be difficult to hear.

And those who couldn't accept this

Those who couldn't embrace this,
found themselves filled with anger
standing on the brow of a hill
ready to hurl him,
and his message,
headlong down the cliff.

But instead,
"Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

Be clear here,
Jesus did not leave Nazareth that day and go elsewhere because he was rejected;
Instead Jesus was rejected because he gave notice he **will** go elsewhere.

And folks...that "elsewhere" beckons us, too.

As those who have experienced scripture fulfilled in our own hearing,
we too should find ourselves
strangers in a strange land,
traveling a road to someplace more exciting,
and following the God we cannot tame.

Jesus' message and ministry was a reminder that we too are to go where God calls us
We too are to trust God and step out of our comfort zones
We too are to trust that while we don't know what God's future will look like we can trust it will
be bigger and better than we can imagine because God has imagined it.
We too are not to stay in one place, only looking inward at what we can get done for ourselves
We are instead to follow the King of Kings out into the world
Where God's message of salvation can be heard and seen by everyone...
Friend as well as stranger.

For me following Jesus means I will actually take my leave of this congregation and venture into
a new call
But for you that could mean any number of exciting roads.

Where is God calling you?
Where is God beckoning you to travel?

Because if you haven't noticed God has been calling you for a long time.
And what is so incredible...
Is you've been answering.

Jesus said, "feed my sheep"
You heard this scripture read and you fulfilled it by supporting our youth group who 50 strong...
slept outside in boxes and raised over \$6,000 for the American Red Cross Homeless shelter.

Pastor Colleen's sermon January 31, 2010

Jesus said, "go out and find the lost"

And our Sonshiners responded by making sure that every single month for more than 30 years a group has showed up at Pickering Nursing home and sang and prayed with the residents.

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself"

And our missions team went to Libertae and brought women and children back to this place and threw them a Christmas party where even Santa could not help but stop by for a visit.

Jesus said, "This is my body given for you."

And a group of 8 members traveled across the world to Tanzania and shared their lives, their stories, their gifts, and their very selves with our partnership congregation in Irete.

Jesus said, "let the little children come to me"

And every year people take vacation time in the summer just so they can volunteer for a week as a Vacation Bible School teacher or leader.

Jesus said, "Follow me"

And 5 our senior high youth traveled to New Orleans and joined with 36,000 other youth to help rebuild a city

Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you"

And every week you show up here and greet each other with hugs and handshakes and genuine care and compassion.

You bring food for the food pantry

You bring sheets and towels for the rescue mission

You make food to be given for Aid for Friends

You teach your children how to pray

You love each other and the stranger

You meet and talk to one another about your faith journeys

You share meals, you participate in service projects, you share your gifts,

you laugh and you share your lives together...

God is beckoning you into the world God created and you've heard and answered the call all because you've trusted that God's future is better than any you could imagine.

But where else are we being called?

Because every day Jesus is beckoning us to notice

how the scripture is fulfilled in our hearing.

Every day we are being called and every day we have the opportunity to serve

And sometimes we can serve right in these walls

And sometimes we can go out from here and serve in the community

for me that means leaving my "hometown"

And traveling to lands yet unknown

To be a stranger in a strange land...

But I go
Just as we all go
Knowing that we NEVER travel alone
Knowing that the road we walk has already been traveled on by the one who is always leading
the way...and cheering us on
The one who provides nourishment for the journey
Food for our souls
And love enough to share with the world.

Is not this Joseph's son??
Yes,
and I will follow him out of his hometown and into the world

I pray that you will always follow him too.
And I pray that our prayers are always linked together so we may remember that we are fellow
travelers on the same road
Partners in the same journey
And parts of the same body of Christ.

God bless you all on your journeys..
Amen

**May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your
minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen**