



Liturgical Day: The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
Date: June 5, 2009  
Sermon Title: The Difference Faith Makes

*Capernaum's Faith  
A Model for Nazareth  
Yet Unbelief Reigns*

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

It is nice to be here with you at worship this morning. It seems as though I've been gone for about a lifetime. Every summer I try to take an extended break. It's usually with my family. And I'm usually gone for two or three weeks. And once I get back, it usually feels like I've been gone for a while. This year that seems even more the case. Of course it is because the experience of these past three weeks has been so powerful. As most of you know, a group of us spent a couple weeks in Tanzania – during the first part of the trip we were meeting with missionaries and health care providers in and around the city of Arusha, and during the second half of the trip we were spending time in Tanzania's spectacular national parks on safari. Those of you who have been following my posts on Saint Peter's web site have a sense for what this trip has meant to us, and we'll pull the group together soon on a Sunday to show you some pictures and tell you all about it. But so much has happened in the past three weeks that it seems like lifetime since we've been together. And as rich as the trip was, I am very glad to be back here with you.

This morning, we turn to the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the sixth chapter. This is set fairly early on in the story of Jesus' life and ministry. After being tempted in the wilderness, Jesus gathers his disciples and moves to Capernaum, where he is teaching and healing and casting out demons – and great crowds begin to follow him. As St. Mark puts it, the people there in Capernaum are *overcome with amazement* at what Jesus is able to do. They are impressed by his power and his compassion and his authority. And, not coincidentally, Jesus is able to do great wonders when he is with this open and eager group of listeners.

In today's Gospel, however, he returns to his own home town of Nazareth, and we see an entirely different picture. He tries to teach in the synagogue, and the people initially are struck by his wisdom and his power, but eventually they conclude that he is just the boy next door – just the son of Joseph and Mary – and they take offense at him. Curiously enough, St. Mark tells us that because of this, Jesus is unable to do anything remarkable in Nazareth. Their lack of faith makes it impossible for him to accomplish much at all in their midst. This man, in Capernaum, was able to teach with wisdom and authority, and cast out unclean spirits, and heal the sick, and cast out demons, and cleanse lepers, and calm the sea, and even raise the dead. Yet in Nazareth, because they couldn't see him as anything other than the boy next door, he is unable to do anything at all. St. Mark tells us that Jesus is amazed at their unbelief.

So he does something rather counter-intuitive. We might have expected him to go, immediately, back to Capernaum, where he had been more successful. We might have expected him to put himself in a situation where he had better odds of success. If the people from Nazareth don't believe, perhaps the people of Capernaum would be a more productive place for him to be working. But no, in a sense he does exactly the opposite. He does something that even has less of a chance of being successful than what he

himself has done in Nazareth. He sends his followers out on his behalf, and he charges them to continue

FIRST LESSON  
**EZEKIEL 2:1-5**  
PSALM  
**PSALM 123**  
SECOND LESSON  
**2 CORINTHIANS 12:2-10**  
GOSPEL LESSON  
**ST. MARK 6:1-13**  
SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES:  
**2 SAMUEL 5:1-5, 9-10**  
**PSALM 48**  
PRAYER OF THE DAY  
**GOD OF THE COVENANT, IN  
OUR BAPTISM YOU CALL US  
TO PROCLAIM THE COMING  
OF YOUR KINGDOM. GIVE  
US THE COURAGE YOU  
GAVE THE APOSTLES, THAT  
WE MAY FAITHFULLY  
WITNESS TO YOUR LOVE  
AND PEACE IN EVERY  
CIRCUMSTANCE OF LIFE, IN  
THE NAME OF JESUS  
CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR AND  
LORD. AMEN.**

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what he has been doing (and, remember, what he couldn't do in Nazareth), as they go without him, from town to town.

On the face of it, that seems like a crazy proposal. He comes to Nazareth. He tries to teach and heal and welcome people into the kingdom. He is almost entirely unsuccessful. So he sends his assistants out and instructs them to go and do what he has just been unable to do.

What it is, however, is a testimony to how strong our Lord's belief is in the power of God. You see, Jesus knows that effective ministry is not dependent on the strength of the minister, or on the ability of the one who is ministering, or on the track record that one has established. No, the effectiveness of any particular ministry is dependant on the power of God that moves through it. And when people sense that power of God, and trust in it, it can be a life changing experience for them.

So I've got to tell you just a little bit about these past couple of weeks. I know I can't say much, because our group wants to take a morning and share their impressions with you, and I certainly don't want to steal their thunder. But of all that we experienced – and for me that is quite a bit: two stays in London, eight days in Arusha, four nights on safari none of which I have ever done before – it was a pretty big trip for me – but out of all that we experienced, by far the most powerful experiences were when we spent time with people who were doing ministry in Tanzania. We had a chance to spend a couple days with Dr. Mark Jacobson, a man who grew up in the same town I did, who showed up in Arusha some twenty years ago, and has transformed a small 15 bed medical dispensary into two 120 bed full-service hospitals. We had a chance to spend a morning with Sarah Wallis, an Occupational Therapist from Melbourne, Australia, who had a vision for how she could play a key role in making sure that children who had surgery in Dr. Jacobson's hospital were given a chance to heal and become strong before returning to their families and the routines of everyday life. She now runs a care facility where forty to fifty of these kids prepare for and recover from surgery, and has made a huge difference in their lives. We had a chance to spend time with Crispin Mugarela, a young man only a couple years out of college, who grew up an orphan, and was determined to help other children who were in the same situation as he was. Crispin, on his own, has developed an orphanage where fifty of these young children learn and grow and are loved – and it is opening doors for them that would never have been opened before.

Each of these faithful people are, in some respects, just normal, everyday, run-of-the-mill human beings. The kind of people that you and I might find living next door to us. But for one difference: they have faith. They, like the people of Capernaum, know what can happen when Jesus is part of the equation. And each of them has made an incredible difference in the lives of those they have been privileged to meet and to know. They haven't ever had enough resources to do everything they wanted to do. In some cases, they have wondered, from month to month, how they are going to get through. But each of them felt called by God to be involved in these life-giving ministries. Each of them has been willing to trust that God will supply them with the strength and the stamina and the resources to do what they feel called to do. And, to paraphrase this morning's Gospel, I have no doubt that Jesus is amazed at their faith and determination.

So what do we make of that? We might respond by giving thanks that we've had a chance to see such faithful and productive servants. As they told their stories I was just awestruck – humbled just by the chance to hang around with them for a few hours. But to simply be struck by their accomplishments is to miss the point. What is truly unique about them is their faith, their sense of being called to this work, and their capacity to trust that if they give it their best, God will make use of it to cause something incredible to happen.

Throughout the Bible, we notice that God chooses simple, run-of-the-mill human beings to accomplish great things in this world. God has chosen Mark and Sarah and Crispin: I'm convinced of that. But I am equally convinced that God has chosen you and me to make a difference in our neighborhoods, and we sell ourselves short – we sell our God short – when we fail to realize that God can do great things through us as well.

It's easy to make the case that there are other Christians who are stronger, wiser, more gifted than we are, who could do a better job than you or me. It is easy to make the case that there are other congregations with larger memberships, bigger budgets, stronger staffs, than we have here at Saint Peter. But to do so is a cop out. In this morning's Gospel lesson, Jesus sends out a group of followers to do what he has just been

unable to do. He sends them out with full confidence that their ministry will be effective. And, as a matter of fact, it is effective. We read, at the end of the Gospel, that they were able to *cast out many demons, and anoint with oil many who were sick and cure them*. It happened, not because they were especially well gifted to exorcise or heal. It happened because they were willing to trust in God, and the people they met were willing to believe that God was working through them.

If I learned anything in Tanzania, I learned this: that no matter how big the problem, no matter how complicated the situation, no matter how desperate the need – one person can make a difference. All it takes is faith: faith that God will work through us to make a difference; faith that God is working through those who have accepted the call, and who have invested themselves in Christian ministry.

One day, in the villages that surrounded Nazareth, Jesus sent his followers out into the world to make a difference. They trusted that God was in that sending, and that God's power would be with them, and they made more of a difference than any of them had every thought possible. Today God sends you and me out, to make a difference in our world. As we trust that God is in the sending, and that God's power will move through us, we too can make more of difference than we ever imagined.

It is good to be back. Now let's get at it. And I can't wait to see what God will accomplish through us in the weeks and months to come.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (July 4, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text: <sup>i</sup>

<sup>1</sup>He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. <sup>2</sup>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! <sup>3</sup>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 offense at him. <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." <sup>5</sup>And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup>And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup>He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup>He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup>but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup>He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup>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." <sup>12</sup>So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup>They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. <sup>ii</sup>

Greek Text:

<sup>1</sup>Καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκεῖθεν καὶ ἔρχεται εἰς τὴν πατρίδα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθοῦσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ.<sup>2</sup>καὶ γενομένου σαββάτου ἤρξατο διδάσκειν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀκούοντες ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες· πόθεν τούτῳ ταῦτα, καὶ τίς ἡ σοφία ἢ δοθεῖσα τούτῳ, καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τοιαῦται διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ γινόμεναι;<sup>3</sup>οὐχ οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας καὶ ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσήτος καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος; καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ ὧδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς; καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ.<sup>4</sup>καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἀτιμὸς εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ.<sup>5</sup>καὶ οὐκ ἐδύνατο ἐκεῖ ποιῆσαι οὐδεμίαν δύναμιν, εἰ μὴ ὀλίγοις ἀρρώστοις ἐπιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐθεράπευσεν.<sup>6</sup>καὶ ἐθαύμαζεν διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν.

Καὶ περιῆγεν τὰς κόμας κύκλῳ διδασκῶν.<sup>7</sup>Καὶ προσκαλεῖται τοὺς δώδεκα καὶ ἤρξατο αὐτοὺς ἀποστέλλειν δύο δύο καὶ ἐδίδου αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν ἀκαθάρτων,<sup>8</sup>καὶ παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴδὲν

<sup>i</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> St. Mark 6:1-6, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

αἴρωσιν εἰς ὁδὸν εἰ μὴ ῥάβδον μόνον, μὴ ἄρτον, μὴ πήραν, μὴ εἰς τὴν ζώνην χαλκόν,<sup>9</sup> ἀλλὰ ὑποδεδεμένους σανδάλια, καὶ μὴ ἐνδύσησθε δύο χιτῶνας.<sup>10</sup> καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· ὅπου ἂν εἰσέλθητε εἰς οἰκίαν, ἐκεῖ μένετε ἕως ἂν ἐξέλθητε ἐκεῖθεν.<sup>11</sup> καὶ ὅς ἂν τόπος μὴ δέξηται ὑμᾶς μηδὲ ἀκούσωσιν ὑμῶν, ἐκπορευόμενοι ἐκεῖθεν ἐκτινάξατε τὸν χουῖν τὸν ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν ὑμῶν εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς.<sup>12</sup> Καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν ἵνα μετανοῶσιν,<sup>13</sup> καὶ δαιμόνια πολλὰ ἐξέβαλλον, καὶ ἤλειφον ἐλαίῳ πολλοὺς ἀρρώστους καὶ ἐθεράπευον.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>iii</sup> St. Mark 6:1-6, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).