

Year B Proper 14 One Choice After Another Mark 6:1-13

We cannot get through life without making choices. In fact, we cannot get through one day, perhaps not even just one hour, of our lives without making choices. Most of our choices over the course of the day or week are a series of small, inconsequential ones – should I watch hockey or baseball, buy the chocolate chip cookies or the shortbread with icing, read a book or go for a walk?

Some of our choices, on the other hand, are doozies...they impact our lives in consequential ways. Which new vehicle should I buy – or should I buy used? Is it time to sell my home and move into an apartment? Do I agree to take the experimental drug new on the market or stick with traditional treatments? The choices we make over the years can change the course our lives have taken...who to marry or not marry...which job to take or not take...where to settle down...how to deal with challenging children, relatives, friends...

We cannot get through life without making choices. Our gospel story today tells us a few very important things about making choices so let's take a closer look.

Jesus went back to his hometown and his disciples followed him. They followed him. Right of the bat, in the first sentence we hear, we are confronted with choice...the disciples have made the choice to follow Jesus, to leave their hometowns and follow Jesus to his. What they find there astounds even Jesus.

Things start off well. Jesus heads into the synagogue on the Sabbath and amazes those present with the knowledge and wisdom of his teaching about God. They marvel at the deeds of power done by his hands. But, things go sour.

Wait a minute, they say. Isn't this Mary's boy – the carpenter? He's nothing special, he's one of us...a working class nobody. And they decide to shut down their amazement. They block out their marvel. They choose not to believe that Jesus is anyone special. Jesus is offering them life in God's kingdom – a life of reconciliation with God and neighbour, a life of wholeness and contentment. And they say, "No." They choose unbelief. They choose zero faith in the Son of God.

And Jesus is amazed at their unbelief. He has offered them the path of life and they have chosen not to walk on it. Our God is a God who offers but never forces. He loves and desires us to love in return. Love not freely given is not love and so we always have the choice. Our God is amazed at the people who choose not to love in return: "And he could do no deed of power there," we are told, "except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them." He could do no deed of power there. Belief in Jesus and his doing of deeds of power are clearly connected. But the lack of faith on the part of the hometown crowd does not mean Jesus' power has been zapped – it is not that he is not capable of performing miracles, the people are choosing not to witness them, they are choosing to deny Jesus the opportunity.

That must have been frustrating and disappointing for Jesus to experience this rejection. Some of these people rejecting him were not simply acquaintances – some were friends, some were family. Many of us experience this same frustration and disappointment. We have friends, we have family who do not share our belief.

This Gospel story does not leave us in the pit of frustration and disappointment with rejection though. We are given the way forward. Jesus does not let the

unbelief of his hometown folk end his ministry. Yes, “he was amazed at their unbelief,” but, “Then he went about among the villages teaching.” And, what is more, he sends his disciples out as well. We are gathered so that we may be sent. Jesus sends out his disciples under some conditions that sound pretty tough – they are told to take nothing with them on their journey except for their sandals and staff...they are to take no food, no money...they are to rely on the hospitality of others, and he gives them the heads up that they and their message of life in God’s kingdom will be rejected sometimes. Jesus does give them one very important thing to take with them on their journey though...he gives them authority over unclean spirits. They not only have a message to tell, they have the power to back it up.

The disciples actually agree to all of this which means they are choosing to take something else on their journey as well. Belief. They believe in Jesus who is sending them and they believe they will encounter others who will believe because it is those who believe who will provide for them as they journey. Those who believe will welcome them into their homes, will give them food, will replace worn out clothing. The disciples sign on for life in God’s kingdom – a life in which everyone is cared for, loved, clothed, fed. A life in which demons are cast out and people are made whole. They have faith in Jesus who has told them about this life and they have faith that they will live this life when Jesus sends them out. They choose life in God’s kingdom.

We too have been given life in God’s kingdom. Living that life is a choice and it is a choice that takes constant effort. Life in God’s kingdom is one of reconciliation, unity, love, and compassion. Life in God’s kingdom is the building up and the

bringing together of people. When we engage in activities that do not build up and do not bring together, we send a strong message about what being a Christian means. We send the wrong message about what being a Christian means. And people are listening to our lives. We have a message to tell and the power to back it up. Living life in God's kingdom is our choice – one that we make not just once but daily, often multiple times in a day. And we are human so we will stumble sometimes. We must be ready to forgive and to ask forgiveness. We must be ready to love and be loved. We must be ready to undo the hurt we cause and the hurt caused by world around us.

The disciples are given authority and sent out to encourage people to turn to God, they heal the sick, they cast out demons. The mission is quite the success but not for everyone. We are not told how many times they had to shake the dust off their shoes when they and their message of life was rejected as it was in Nazareth.

We live in a Nazareth world. People around us – even friends and family – are not much interested in hearing about Jesus, some are hostile to the message. But we are sent, like the disciples so long ago, with authority, to proclaim the message of life in God's kingdom despite the failure at Nazareth.

In fact, we are sent with more than what they had. We have the presence of Jesus with us. They left Jesus behind as they set out. We do not. With the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, God speaks to us and through us. God's word "has the power to penetrate whatever barrier the individual or collective heart sets up against it. And it brings with it light, freedom, peace, and life. It has the power not only to inform but to transform" (p.225 of Lift Up Your Hearts). We

have the choice to accept or reject God's word and then we have the choice to **be** God's word – proclaiming life in God's kingdom to everyone around us as we choose this life, living lives that build up and bring together.

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