

## Proper 9B

July 5, 2015

Mark 6:1-13

*Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, 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 offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, 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.*

Each Monday or Tuesday, David Lose, President of Luther Seminary in Philadelphia, writes an email letter to preachers, commenting on the coming Sunday's Gospel lesson. I subscribe to these letters. This week's email letter was so honest and timely – especially for us Episcopalians – that I wanted to share it with you verbatim. I have edited out a few paragraphs for the sake of brevity, and inserted a few parenthetical phrases for clarification or to refer to our own recently concluded Episcopal General Convention, but aside from that, the words are those of Dr. Lose. He writes:

“Dear Partner in Preaching,

“Anyone interested in talking about prejudice and racism this Sunday? What about gay marriage?

“My guess is that a few – probably a *very* few – of us can't **wait** to talk about just these things because they are passions of ours. My other guess is that *most* of us would rather not. And that we've got lots of very good reasons not to. These issues are too controversial, too painful, too divisive. And, perhaps above and beyond *these* reasons, we know that people don't come to church to talk about these things.

“But here’s the thing: People *are* talking about them. With friends, with family members, with co-workers. In fact, because of the shootings in Charleston two weeks ago and the Supreme Court verdict last week [and I would add the decisions of our Episcopal General Convention this past week], our folks are talking about just these things **lots** of places... just not at church. Which makes me wonder if our people experience church as a place to go where you don’t have to talk about these kinds of difficult things, or whether church is the place you end up talking about lots of things that don’t seem to *matter* in daily life.

“I have this feeling that more people than we might imagine actually wouldn’t mind having church **be** a place where you can talk about some of the hard things going on in life and in the news. Not the place where you’re told what to think or how to vote, mind you, but where we take the task of Christian formation seriously enough to offer perspectives on how the Scriptures and our faith help us navigate this very challenging world...

“Which is really the reason I’m bringing all this up – not simply because there are huge issues in the news right now that our people are talking about, but also... because the Gospel passage appointed for this week has a lot to tell us about what it means to be a disciple, a disciple in a challenging, difficult, confusing, and at times painful world which is also and simultaneously a place of beauty and wonder... and beloved of God.

“What I find fascinating in the first scene [in today’s Gospel] is the treatment Jesus receives from his [own] neighbors and hometown friends. Why such disdain? Perhaps it’s just that familiarity does indeed breed contempt. But perhaps it’s also that *we have such a hard time receiving grace from unexpected places*. We have such a hard time receiving grace from unexpected places. Jesus wasn’t what they expected a prophet, let alone a Messiah, to look like. And to accept him as such was to call into question much of what they *thought* they **knew** about the world and about people and about themselves.

“Isn’t that also what is so difficult when we talk about perceptions of those who are different from **us**? Whether they are different in terms of their age or occupation or economic status or race or ethnicity or sexual orientation, we tend to have a construct about how people **should** be, and when we meet someone who differs from that we often find it threatening.

“In this case, it’s not that Jesus is *different* from them – he was **one** of them! – it’s that he’s different from what they think a **prophet should** be. And so rather than revise their expectations, they dismiss him. Indeed, when Mark reports that they name him according to his mother and brothers and sisters... but omitted naming his father, one wonders if they weren’t calling his legitimacy into question, trying to taint him in his person to dismiss his proclamation. [They likely knew, after all, that Mary had become pregnant **before** she and Joseph were married.]

“All too often, **we** are tempted to do the same, reducing someone who challenges us to a single attribute about that person – whether skin color or age or orientation – in order to dismiss them; and thereby *fail to receive the totality of the person God has created and redeemed and offered to us as a gift.* [repeat]...

“And notice that when the disciples are sent out, they are sent out to live utterly dependent on the grace and hospitality of others. They are **not** to take everything they need, but to invite others [some of whom are undoubtedly very different from them] into their mission... and into their lives. Which is interesting, because while Jesus had just been on the receiving end of an extreme **lack** of hospitality, yet *he knows that the human community he is forming has at its core the interdependence, mutuality, and utter vulnerability that true hospitality simultaneously demands and creates.* [repeat]

“...Yes, it’s difficult to talk about prejudice and racism because it hits too close to home. Some bear the scars of prejudice, while others fear being accused of it. And, yes, it’s frightening to contemplate changing moral values or, more accurately, noting our changed **sense** of what really is moral and true. And, yes, in the face of these challenges it can be really, really tempting to want to keep things the same, gather with those who look and think like us, and draw the boundaries of who’s in and who’s out a little tighter.

“And yet deep down we know that this is not what God calls us to. Every time you draw a line, in fact, between who’s in and who’s out, you can bet you’ll find Jesus on the other side. And the steps we may take – the steps most of us actually *want* to take – toward greater acceptance, even when it means uncomfortable moments and difficult conversations – are easier to take when we don’t walk this path alone. And so we turn for help and courage to Jesus, the one who still sends disciples out equipped with the power to face down the unclean spirits of prejudice and racism in whatever form they appear. And we take these steps **together**, because that’s what it means to be the Body of Christ.

“I am writing this letter to you in anticipation of the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend and celebrations, and those of you living in the U.S. will be preaching a day **after** all that as well. Might we this week, Dear Partner in Preaching, invite our people to independence from the idea that we have to go it alone, that we can only rely on ourselves and those just like us, that we cannot grow or change without losing something dear to us. Jesus is still sending out disciples, still inviting us to do great things together, still calling us to discover independence through interdependence and strength through vulnerability. This can still be a hard message to hear, and so I pray God’s gifts of courage and grace [dear preacher] as you announce the good news in your communities and neighborhoods.

“Yours in Christ,  
David”

From David Lose, "**Pentecost 6 B – Independence & Interdependence**",  
Posted: 29 Jun 2015 11:41 AM PDT

[http://www.davidlose.net/2015/06/pentecost-6-b-independence-and-interdependence/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3Adavidlose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29](http://www.davidlose.net/2015/06/pentecost-6-b-independence-and-interdependence/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3Adavidlose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29)