

Mark 6:1-6. Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! ³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

**Christians are not always welcome
We are to expect opposition, offense, and indifference
Strengthened in the Word we will go out with the Word.**

This past week we welcomed two new called workers to our area. We rolled out the red carpet as best as we could. We helped them move in, offered them meals, we introduced ourselves. We wanted them to feel appreciated and loved, welcomed and at home as part of the local body of Christ. I hope they do feel that way for there is great encouragement in being welcomed into a fellowship, a family of believers. It also seems that the last few weeks have been a unique season for such highlights of encouragement. Other congregations have recently experienced that joy of welcoming newly placed servants of the gospel as well. On top of that we are not that far removed from a few notable WELS gatherings and rallies. The WELS international youth rally, the LWMS convention, and the WELS district conventions, blessed believers with the opportunity to come together, to be encouraged that we are *never alone*, and to celebrate our great heritage of being united in faith through the word of God. There is something extremely beneficial in such gatherings; for whenever we are gathered together among a fellowship of believers united in Christ there is a welcome strengthening of our faith that takes place as we hear and study the Word of God together.

Such encouragement found in the body of Christ, in the fellowship of the church - whether it is on the international or more local scale - is such a great blessing and welcome source of strength, because the truth is, it's not always going to be that way for any of us as Christians. If we expect that entire world around us is going to lay out the red carpet, to welcome our beliefs, to welcome and embrace biblical teaching and support and encourage us in the ways of God, we are sorely mistaken. Such a misplaced expectation might even be considered dangerous as it would set us up for severe disappointment and even spiritual disaster. In our lesson today, Jesus properly prepares his disciples for the ups and downs of ministry, he prepares his believers for

the blessings and challenges of the Christian life. And so today, Jesus reminds us that, **Christians are Not Always Welcome.** As his disciples and followers, **we are to expect opposition, offense, and indifference; and yet strengthened in the Word we will go out with the Word.**

Consider the scene that is portrayed for us here in Mark. Where was Jesus coming from? He was coming from Jairus' house. He was coming from this high point in his ministry as he just raised a little girl from the dead. Peter, James, and John were the only disciples who had seen exactly what happened, but the rest of the disciples had certainly experienced the astonishment and the rush of awe that was directed toward Jesus in the moments that followed this mighty act. That's where Jesus and his disciples were coming from, but now notice where he was going. We are told that *Jesus left there, he left Jairus' house, and he went to his hometown and his disciples went with him.*

Why would Jesus go from such a high point in his ministry to what would happen in Nazareth? What purpose would such a trip serve? Well it would certainly bring the disciples back down to earth. They certainly would have been "flying high" from the amazing happenings at Jairus' house. The great belief showed by Jairus, the profound aura of awe that surrounded the events at his home, would now be paired with a heavy cloud of unbelief demonstrated at Nazareth. This example of unbelief at Nazareth would be so shocking that it would leave even Jesus amazed at their lack of faith. From the ministry high point of Jairus' house to the low of Nazareth was an important and necessary journey because of where Jesus' disciples were going next. Soon after their trip to Nazareth Jesus would send them out two by two with his word. They would be welcomed at some places other places they would not. The lesson would often be quite clear: followers of Jesus are not always welcome by this world. However, strengthened by the Word they would go out with the Word.

The reality that Jesus was teaching his disciples then and teaching us now as well is that there will be highs and lows as we go out with his message. There will be uplifting stories of faith and there will be discouraging examples of unbelief. As followers of Jesus we certainly want to celebrate and rejoice in the great miracles of faith that we are blessed to witness and experience, but we are also to expect that in this sinful world there will be difficult low points that will challenge us as we live out and share our faith. However, our Savior also reminds us that no such challenge - no matter how personally discouraging - ought to rob us of our faith, or our hope, or our trust in Jesus. On the contrary, God's Word is there to encourage us. In fact, God's Word encourages us that suffering for the sake of the gospel demonstrates that we bear Christ's name and that we are in fellowship with him.

For in the Word of God we see that even Jesus himself went through rejection, opposition, offense and indifference. On the heels of raising a girl from the dead, the residents of his own hometown heard his preaching and teaching and they outright rejected him. Some dismissed him, from another account we are told that they were so outraged by his claims that they wanted to kill him, right then and there. Despite such personal rejection, Jesus did not give up, but he continued on in sharing and fulfilling

the message of salvation. In his great love for all sinners, Jesus endured opposition and rejection and shame all the way to the cross. He was rejected and scorned, made to feel unwelcome and unwanted by the very world that he created and loved. He endured all this in order to save us. The Son of God endured all of this so that all who believe in him might be welcomed into fellowship with him through faith and welcomed to his side forever in the paradise of heaven.

Yes, even Jesus met personal rejection in his life, his own neighbors, people from his own hometown scoffed and dismissed the message that he brought and threatened him and yet that did not mean that Jesus would give up on his mission and his message. So too we will continue to go out with the Word. Jesus prepares his disciples to faithfully preach and teach and live out their faith no matter the reaction. Some would listen to them, others would not. In fact, some would even get angry, offended, and violent, while others would remain generally indifferent. With this experience Jesus then sends out his disciples with an appropriate sense of reality as they took his message of salvation out to the world. They would not be crushed or thrown into unbelief and despair by the challenges of going out into an unwelcoming world; but strengthened by the Word and supported by each other they would go out to the world with his Word.

As those who attended rallies return to everyday life, as our new called workers settle into their new vocations, as we go out from this place of worship and spiritual refreshment the realities of everyday life might bring a little shock to the system. For the world around us, often takes offense at the message of the Bible and the ways of God. The rational world scoffs at those who believe that God would take on flesh to save sinful mankind. The rational world would even scoff at the concepts of sin and grace. In one breath neighbors criticize the notion of sin and promote a type of moral free for all. In another breath the same neighbors criticize the fact of forgiveness and the removal of guilt would be so freely given through Jesus Christ. As Christians we will stand at odds with society, with friends, and neighbors, and even family about a whole number of things, often we will disagree about what is right and wrong, we will have a very different view concerning the meaning and purpose of life and the way of salvation. And that means we will meet opposition, rejection, ridicule and general indifference.

This is a notion not easily dismissed, for this can be a very difficult aspect of the Christian life. There is a part of us that very much wants to be accepted and welcomed by those around us. We don't like feeling shut out, we don't like being put down, we don't like being questioned and criticized by friends, family, and co-workers. There is a part of us that rebels against such opposition and it is the same sinful part that by nature rebels against God. What keeps us from giving into this desire to feel welcomed by the world? What keeps us from giving into despair and forsaking the ways of God or at least covering up or altering our beliefs so that we may fit in with the world a little bit more? God points us back to the faithful Word, our faithful Savior, and the Holy Spirit working through the Word.

Strengthened by the Word we will go out with the Word. In his Word God tells us

everything that we need to know for our eternal salvation. In his Word, Jesus is revealed as our Savior who relentlessly went out and taught and shared and lived the good news of salvation. And through this word Jesus also prepares us for the opposition and the rejection that those who believe and follow his Word will face. Strengthened by the Word we will go out with the Word. Through the holy Word God holds us fast, his faithfulness keeps us faithful. His Word strengthens us and brings us together for the encouragement that we need; so that despite opposition, we will believe in him. Strengthened by the Word we will hold onto the word. We will treasure its truths and hold it as pure and good and right; and by faith in Jesus we will also live according to the Word of God. We will use the Word in our daily lives. We will share the good news of salvation and pass on the rich truths of the Christian life to the world around us, to our children, to our friend and family, to our neighbors. Some will receive it with hearts of faith others will unfortunately dismiss it, criticize it, and ignore it.

This is the reality that Jesus prepared his disciples for, and this is encouragement that he gives us still today. Do not be discouraged. Do not give up. Strengthened by the Word we will faithfully go out with the word even into an unwelcoming world.

As we discuss the ups and downs, the blessings and challenges of the Christian life, the words that we heard from our second lesson seem to be a very fitting way to wrap up our time today. The apostle Paul, imprisoned and looking back at his ministry and his life of faith in Jesus, would share the following encouragement with a young pastor Timothy, who was just getting started in the ministry of taking the word of God out into world that would not always be welcoming. Paul, in his wonderful words of encouragement, really does nothing more than point Timothy back to the faithful word and his faithful Savior. ***But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

Dear friends in Christ, this is my prayer for you, this is my encouragement for us as we live out our faith. Let us look to the Word and be strengthened by the Word so that we may go out with the Word of God. Opposition, offense, and indifference will come as we each face an unwelcoming world, and yet strengthened in the Word we go out with the Word. Amen.