

*Based on *Mark 6:1-6. Prophet Jesus Can't Convince His Own "Home Church"*

** incarnation translation below*

Jane and Bob Ramsey are two retired mentors of mine who served a White church in Georgia in the height of the civil rights movement. They had not planned on becoming advocates for racial justice when they met and married and entered into a life of ministry together. But this was the situation in which they found themselves. So they prayed and they sought the wisdom of the Scriptures and they responded faithfully to the call when it came: preaching and teaching and marching and challenging their congregation to live into the racial justice demands of the moment.

It was not an easy. They lost a lot of friends. They lost even more parishioners. They lived in constant fear of violence. But their four young children were watching, and they knew the integrity of their faith was being tested. At the end of the day they knew their most important job was, as the song says, to teach their children well.

And then ...

Years later their daughter came home from college with a radical new idea. The Stonewall riots had brought the struggles of the gay community to public awareness, and gay activism was taking hold on college campuses across the country. Jane and Bob's daughter told her parents that, although she herself was not gay, she had become involved in the cause of gay rights. They were crushed.

"You are running away from everything we ever taught you!" they told her sternly over a holiday meal. "You *know* this is wrong!"

"It is not," she stammered, trying not to shout, but still feeling rebellious. "*You* taught me that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. *You* taught me to risk ridicule and rejection and even the threat of violence in order to work for justice. I am *not* running away. You just don't want to listen."

She was right, Jane and Bob told me when I met them decades later. The very thing we had tried to teach her, she had to come back to teach us. We did not listen at first. But she was right.

"What is this wisdom that has been given to Jesus?" the members of his synagogue ask when he comes back home to teach them in a new way what they have already taught him. *Who do you think you are?* they want to know.

And even though Jesus has just healed a woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years and even though he has just raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, the prophet who, as Joan Chittister says, calls us all to be "carriers of the prophetic message," can do no deed of power in his own hometown, because they do not believe.

It is, in fact, a story repeated generation after generation when we try to pass on the values that we cherish ... only to have them reinterpreted back to us in ways we never imagined. In ways we may even find threatening.

Youth Ministry guru Mark Yaconelli, tells a similar story:

A friend of mine who is a youth minister and a committed Christian called me one evening after receiving a phone call from her college-age son. She sounded distressed as she told me her son had decided to leave his studies to join a group of Americans going to Iraq to be with Iraqi civilians during the U.S. bombing and occupation. The group hoped that by being a visible presence as American citizens, they might be able to protect the lives of civilians, as well as increase awareness about the suffering of Iraqis back in the States.

My friend was upset and told her son he had made a commitment to college and this was no time to engage in radical politics. I asked how her son responded. She sighed, and there was quiet over the phone line for a moment. Then she answered with a sob in her voice. “He said, ‘But Mom, this isn’t politics. This is about following Jesus. We’re going as a Christian group. Didn’t you and the church teach me that Jesus was always befriending people who were weak and suffering?’”

I waited in silence. I could hear her crying. Then finally she said, “He’s right, you know. I know he’s right. But if I knew he was going to do something like this, I would’ve taken him out of the church and raised him to be a Chippendale dancer” (43).

Before I go any further, I want to step back and give my full pastoral support to any member of this congregation who currently serves or has served in the military and to offer a word of prayer for each of us this morning who has a loved one serving in uniform right now. This is not a sermon about a Christian ethic of war and peace. This is a sermon about how we at SPC are going about the business of nurturing and responding to the young prophets among us in our own hometown.

The good news is that, as far as I can tell, SPC is well-versed in not only receiving the home-grown prophetic wisdom of the young people who make their way through this community but *acting* on it!

Witness our own homegrown prophet Brandon Dennison and his insistence on economic justice in the coal-fields of southern West Virginia. Witness our own homegrown prophet Morgan Wisniewski Sell and her insistence on environmental justice and LGBTQIA+ justice and racial justice in her ministry with students at Shepherd University. Witness our own homegrown prophet Eli Dillow who joined the adult ed conversations on race prejudice and White Privilege and then kept demanding, “So what are we going to *do* about it?!” Their stories and many more have already established SPC as a congregation not only committed to nurturing the prophetic spirituality of emerging generations but also as a congregation committed to learning from our own homegrown prophets in return.

The danger for us lies in resting on our laurels. As our Teach the Preacher gathering admitted this week, there is still a lot of healing that needs to be done. More than ever, some might say, as we face a Cold Civil War in our own country alongside a never-ending pandemic meltdown and a brewing climate catastrophe on a global scale.

We cannot become complacent.

Can you imagine the world our children and youth will inherit? Can you face the truth of the world they *already* inhabit?

I cannot. It is beyond anything I want to even begin to think about. I just want to crawl up in a whole and block it out.

And yet ...

“We have a choice,” says Joan Chittister in the book our Sunday Seminar has taken up this semester. The church that claims to be “rooted in The Way of Jesus” can either give up hope and accept our doomed fate or we can, as Chittister says, “live out our faith on the streets of the world, rather than just talking about it.”

The good news for SPC is that we are doing that, too, each of us in our own way. Every time we “refuse,” as Chittister says, “to be pawns in the destruction of a global world,” we are joining the ranks of prophets in our own hometown, whether or not our message is accepted or rejected by the powers that be. We may not be “successful,” in actually ushering in the reign of God’s justice and peace, at least according to the usual measures of success. But the biblical prophets were not successful either. Even Jesus “failed,” according to usual measures of success. Our job is simply to be faithful to the call of our time.

To that end, we at SPC are bringing increased anti-racism training to the elected leadership of the congregation in order to facilitate a churchwide perspective for the anti-racism work we have already done in pockets of the congregation. We are advocating with our elected officials around voting rights and climate action and LGBTQIA+ equality. We are organizing against statewide legislation to ban teaching the truth of our nation’s history of racial injustice. We are supporting refugees at our southern border. We are supporting a local family with the Sage Place Habitat Built. We are teaching our kids to walk as Peace Pilgrims and to plant trees as an act of solidarity with the earth from which we come.

And we will not stop doing any of it. Because we are and we have been and we will always be, here at SPC, rooted in The Way of Jesus, which means we are “committed to being and becoming a people of radical compassion, working for justice and wholeness in ourselves and in the world.”

Let the church say, Amen!

Mark 6:1-6

*On the sabbath, as is his custom,
Jesus begins to preach in the synagogue,
the same message he has been preaching all over Galilee:
good news for the poor and oppressed.*

*Before he can finish,
a murmur of panic ripples throughout the congregation.*

*“Where did he get this message from?
How dare he call this nonsense wisdom?
We heard this bastard son of Mary,
brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon
was “working miracles”!
Ha! What a scandal.”*

*Jesus is incredulous.
“Prophets are not without honor,
except in their hometown,
and among their own kin,
and in their own house.”*

*And Jesus cannot work any miracles there,
except for a few experiences of healing.
He is shocked by their faithlessness.*

**“Incarnational translation for preaching seeks to recontextualize biblical texts so that they say and do in new times and places something like what they said and did in ancient times and places” (Cosgrove and Edger-
ton, **In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching**, 62).*