

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
July 5, 2015

It's Fourth of July weekend in the United States and many of us have some time off to remember our nation's independence. Yet, as a nation not all things are perfect. We've had our fair share of scandals over the years. Here in Illinois we can think of Rod Blagojevich attempting to sell Obama's congress seat. We could also pretty easily think of the Watergate scandal as well. And there are plenty of scandals to go around outside of politics. We've got everything from Tiger Woods and his affairs to the Roman Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandals. Scandals are a part of our world.

And today's Gospel reading is no exception. In today's reading we find Jesus walking into his hometown where he began teaching the synagogue. To us this is about the most boring statement in the Bible. Yet to the people that knew Jesus this was a scandalous action. We are told in verse 3 that they were offended, but literally that phrase translates to "they were scandalized."

And, I get it. All of the sudden there was the little carpenter boy they knew all his life now teaching in the synagogue. It would be like one of our congregation's children going off on a trip and coming back as a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer and us wondering who the heck gave this child the authority to care for our bodies, legal work, or buildings? We might wonder what in the world does this child really know. // So too these people are looking at Jesus and saying, "you're not a rabbi or a teacher. Where in the world do you get your authority? Who credentialed you? Aren't you that boy who is supposed to be a woodworker?"

So I get the people's reaction. They're scandalized. They're probably shocked by him breaking out of the way things are supposed to be. They're horrified that someone as disrespectful and uneducated as Jesus would do something like that. After all, Jesus is from their town, and so didn't they teach him better than to be a fraud? These folks are scandalized and offended.

And sometimes God offends me. I'm sometimes offended by all of Jesus' money talk. I'm offended to think that there's nothing I have to do to earn God's love; after all is anything really free in the world? I'm scandalized by the fact that a symbol of execution is what reminds us of God's love and the "mystery of faith." Face it, our God is scandalous and offensive.

So in the midst of Jesus scandalizing and offensive actions he's rejected. They didn't believe, and he wasn't able to do miracles. Then Jesus goes on to send the disciples out in pairs. He sent them with only a staff requiring them to trust in God and others to provide. And he gave them instructions on how to deal with rejection. He told them how to respond, and it seems like Taylor Swift walked over and reminded us that "players gonna

play, play, play, play, play; and the haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate. Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake; I shake it off, I shake it off."¹ Or in Jesus' words, if the people aren't going to welcome you, then as you leave shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them. This is a powerful statement. There's ownership with the statement that being a messenger of God, that striving for peace and justice, that reminding folks that God provides, that sharing love of all people...all of these things Jesus indicates will undoubtedly, and absolutely be met with a hater at times. It's inevitable. Yet, Jesus (and Taylor actually) say to shake it off. Don't give them the finger, don't return hate for hate, don't wait from a moment to really screw them over. Shake it off in a non-violent and symbolic action.² Shake it off as a new response.

And that's hard to do. Super hard. And so there's a reason why Jesus sends people in pairs. It takes at least two for support and love. And in fact it takes a whole lot of people to support those in the ministry. It takes someone feeding, and clothing, and housing these folks who only have a staff. It takes radical hospitality by those folks to realize the gifts they've been given to share. So I wonder if when we gather together in community to serve could it be that we actually receive more than we give? Perhaps. After all we know the research shows that giving is actually good for our health.³

And sometimes it's good just having someone there with you. My one colleague reminds me that it's important to have faith-filled friends to remind you that there's something bigger. Because with the insurmountable complexity of racism, I know I need something bigger to overcome it. With what feels like never-ending homophobia, I need something more massive than hate. With something so pervasive as fear, I need the hope that permeates and liberates. I need our God that sends us not only in pairs but sends us with a reminder of God's eternal presence in the midst of rejection.

And as it goes this week here at the church it wasn't all rainbows and butterflies. After all you may have heard that we've had 3 rainbow flags stolen from the church in the past few weeks and last Sunday it also included the tearing down of the information in our sign box. Of course for me as a gay man living in a neighborhood that I've always talked about as being warm, welcoming, and accepting, it calls into question a lot of my assumptions. In response to these actions, many folks e-mailed or spoke to me in shock that something like that would happen in Wicker Park, to a church, and after the Supreme Court rulings last week nevertheless. I wholeheartedly agree.

And we've all had those weeks where thing we hope might just be turning around in the world, and it might not be a huge ruling from the Supreme Court that makes us feel like things are looking up, but maybe it's a relationship going well, health problems seemingly resolving, the weather getting a bit less damp. Yet then we get dashed down with an argument, poor test results, a thunderstorm, or torn down rainbow flags.

However, this last week the church received multiple offers to buy new rainbow flags, and in that I knew we were in this together. / We received prayers and messages

¹ <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/taylorswift/shakeitoff.html>

² The New Jerome Biblical Commentary. *Mark 6:11*. P. 609.

³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/01/generosity-health_n_4323727.html

from churches I've never heard of across the country and it reminded me that we aren't alone. I know our God is here with us. / And it was probably the words of our member, Stephanie Hoeman, as she posted the news article to her Facebook page that struck me deeply. She said "Sometimes love means vulnerability. Sometimes love is greeted with hate. But biblically, the rainbow is a symbol of a better future." She says, "I'm thankful to be a member of a congregation that continues to show love anyway and continues to celebrate the hopeful rainbow."

My friends, Stephanie's insight is the message of today's scripture. In a nutshell, we're reminded that while the world rejects our actions of truth, justice, and hope we're given possibility. We're reminded to shake it off because we are not alone. Our God walks with us in the midst of it all, and our God works through others to walk with us. We're reminded that God's scandalous resurrection is larger than any scandal we can imagine. We're reminded of the possibility. Friends, let us celebrate that hopeful rainbow. Let us go forth reminded of a better future. Go forth today knowing you're not alone. Amen.