

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason S. Glombicki

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Today's portion of Mark picks up where we ended last week. Up to this point in Mark's gospel, Jesus was baptized and tempted; he called the disciples, preached, and healed (sometimes on the Sabbath); he told a few parables to speak about God's truth; and last week, he healed an unnamed woman and brought a child back from death. This week, we had two parts in our reading— first, Jesus' rejection and second, the sending of the disciples.

Part one located Jesus in his hometown, called Nazareth. He was teaching in the synagogue and the people were rude. They scoff at him pretending to be a religious scholar and teacher. After all, they knew him since a young boy. They knew he was a carpenter and a common laborer like themselves. So, what could he possibly know? And he was born from that screwed up family, the one with Mary. The townsfolk could not believe Jesus' audacity to teach in the synagogue like a rabbi. I imagine some of them viewed him as a conman trying to remake himself into something that he was not.

Jesus's experience is not unfamiliar in our time. It's the belief that family and place of origin are the only determinates in life. We see it when people believe that immigrants can offer nothing more than day labor. It's the rejection suffered by queer children who are told their identity is a "phase" to outgrow. It's the ideology that says black men are thugs and that all Asians are smart. It's an everyday story rooted in the rejection of others based on assumptions.

However, that rejection didn't stop Jesus. In fact, it propelled him to send out those he taught, that is the disciples. He sent the disciples without much support, without many provisions, and told them to bring about healing. This mission that Jesus commissioned was one of interdependence. Jesus aligned the mode and the message. He sent the disciples to practice what they preached. He told them to teach the message, be the message, and live the message.

You see, what Jesus declared to those who were sent was a deep interconnectivity. Jesus named that teacher and student are united. That the healer and the healed are one. That humanity and creation are connected. And it's no wonder that Jesus sent the disciples with the instruction to anoint the sick with oil. Sure, it was ordinary olive oil, but it was also extraordinary. Oil was a gift from God birthed from the earth.

In Jesus time, olive oil was an important resource. It was something that lit lamps. It was used in soaps, lotions, hair products, and provided nutrition. At the same time, olive oil embodied healing properties. It was used as a medical treatment to soothe and heal wounds and to relieve illness. So, Jesus sent the disciples with a mission to heal and renew. To use God's gifts within the natural world to facilitate healing. To emphasize the interconnectivity of us all.

As of late, I've been thinking back to the beginning of the pandemic. For many in the United States, we are operating in a post-vaccine, late-pandemic manner that is quite different from the early pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic our

interconnectivity was in the spotlight. First, we saw how globally interconnected we were after the virus spread so quickly. We also saw how our actions impacted creation—when factories were closed and the air became markedly cleaner;<sup>1</sup> we saw that with less cars on the road there was a decrease in roadkill and an increase in wildlife’s longevity;<sup>2</sup> so too, when humans were hunkered down inside, wildlife took to the streets and expanded their range.<sup>3</sup> We realized how our actions impact wildlife and air quality. We discovered that national borders, economics, and income could not stop a virus. We finally glimpsed what was veiled— that we are all interconnected. And to bring true healing and wholeness to ourselves, we will need to bring healing and wholeness to all creation—to flora and fauna, to Finland and the Philippines, to young and old, to natives and foreign-born, to us and to them.

You see, the two parts of today’s narrative are not all that different. Although one part emphasizes rejection and the other interconnectivity, they both name the truth found throughout all of Mark’s gospel—that is, God is here, God is there, God is everywhere. God is in a carpenter. God is within Mary’s messed up family. God is in Jesus. God is in the disciples. God is discovered in olive oil. God is in open homes. God is in China, Russia, Uganda, Brazil, and the United States. God’s presence permeates all because we all are interconnected.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/03/04/811019032/why-chinas-air-has-been-cleaner-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/27/884213513/animals-see-a-silver-lining-during-pandemic-as-fewer-are-killed-on-the-road>

<sup>3</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/International/photos-wildlife-roams-planets-human-population-isolates/story?id=70213431>

So, if God is present in all, then how might we acknowledge the divine within all people, places, and things? How might we see holiday bar-b-ques embody divine presence? How might we honor the biodiversity of the world? How might we see God all over the world?

Perhaps it starts by grabbing a beverage and watching the bees. Seeing how the bees buzz from flower to flower. Watching the connections they make from one plant to the next. This simple act is necessary for pollinating and providing food. And, if we were to sip a bit longer and watch a bit closer, we'd notice how bees, bears, and mushrooms all interact.<sup>4</sup> And, the longer we'd sit and sip, the more we'd see that the interactions between species grow. But even then, we'd just begin to see the depth of our interconnection.

Alright, I know you want to get out there and see the bees, so I'm going to leave us here this holiday weekend. For while the United States honors freedom this weekend, maybe we can recall the freedom that we've been given through Christ to see God in all creatures and places. Perhaps we can acknowledge that background, location, and species do not limit to God's presence. Maybe we can see that God has given the power to heal through our interconnections with creation. And maybe, just maybe, we will come to experience God's love more deeply through these gifts. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.americanforests.org/blog/the-interconnectedness-of-bears-mushrooms-and-bees/>