

Surprised

Mark 6:1-6

February 25, 2018

Jesus was surprised. Are you surprised Jesus was surprised? I mean, after all, isn't he the Son of God? Mark says it right at the beginning of his gospel:

This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And, if Jesus is God's Son, wouldn't he know everything? He knew, didn't he, the plans Judas had hidden in his heart? He knew, didn't he, the shame that weighed Peter down when he sat with him by the fire on the beach? And when he came to a well in Samaria and asked a woman for a drink, he knew, didn't he, what she had done and what her heart most desired?

So why wouldn't he know already what was in the hearts of these men and women in the synagogue? Why would he be surprised?

But he was. He did not expect their unbelief. It took him by surprise, because he is human. He is human. Jesus feels anger, pity, hurt, frustration, grief, loneliness, as we do. And Jesus feels surprise, as we do.

We are focussing on Jesus' emotions during Lent to remind us of his humanness, because we need to be reminded of his humanness! Otherwise we keep him at a distance. We admire him, praise him, worship him, from a distance, from a safe distance. But what Jesus wants is for us to follow, and you cannot follow from a safe distance!

If Jesus is human, if Jesus is like me, then I can be like him.

If Jesus, a human being like me, can be angry, but temper that anger with compassion, then I can learn too to channel my anger into productive action, not hurting, but helping.

If Jesus, a human being like me, can feel pity even for his enemies, then it is possible for me to feel pity for my enemies.

If Jesus can be troubled, frustrated, lonely, heartbroken, taken aback, but still choose to do God's will, to not be deterred or dissuaded from seeking God's kingdom above everything else, then I can be as I am, as human as I am, and obey. I can trust God and obey, too, trust implicitly and obey explicitly.

Jesus went home and his disciples went with him. He came home to Nazareth, the town where his family lived, the town where he had been raised, and, as was his practice, as was his habit, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, and there began to teach, to share with these men and women, too, the message, God's good news.

But they were surprised, amazed, taken aback. Because they knew him. They knew his mother. They knew his brothers. They knew his sisters and right where they lived. And they knew him: Jesus, the tekton, the craftsman, the woodworker, the carpenter, the son of a carpenter, plying the family trade, just as each of them were plying their families' trades. (You see, Jesus was a second career rabbi!)

But here he is, lecturing them about the kingdom of God and doing it as if he really knows what he's talking about, as if he really knows God! Where did he get all this? How did he come by all this wisdom? How can he do miracles? All of which being interpreted means: Who does he think he is?

So they rejected him. They were offended by him. They were scandalized by him.

Are you surprised? Jesus was the talk of Galilee. Surely in Nazareth, too, they had heard the news about him, heard of the crowds flocking to him. Are you surprised they didn't welcome him back as a hometown hero? Now if he had been hired on to build an addition for Herod's palace, they would have been proud and welcomed him home as a hero. Or if he had been enlisted as a rabbi in the high priest's service in Jerusalem, they would have been proud and welcomed him home as a hero.

But this? Speaking on his own authority, healing people, announcing the dawn of a new age? But we know him! We saw Mary carrying him around on her back. We saw Joseph teaching him how to use an awl. We saw him roughhousing with his brothers and sisters.

Their offense is the same as ours, if we too cannot get our minds and hearts around the idea that God's power, God's Spirit, God's very being, is embodied, not in a facsimile of a human being, but in a veritable human being, like you, like me. It is scandalous, preposterous, shocking, utterly surprising, to think that we can point to a man, a man living and working and eating and drinking and feeling and dying like us, and say, "There is God."

They couldn't believe it. They didn't believe it. And, as Mark reports,

He was not able to perform any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them.

Are you surprised? Are you surprised that he couldn't? But think about it. Whom did Jesus heal? Jesus healed people who came to him, people who were brought to him, people who asked. They came to him. He didn't go searching for them. He didn't set up a clinic and advertise for clients.

I am not trying to be facetious. I am just trying to point out that the people whom Jesus healed were people who wanted to be healed, people who wanted help, people who wanted to be saved, people who wanted to be saved from illness, from disability, from emptiness, from aimlessness, from hopelessness, from shame.

But the people of his hometown didn't believe. They didn't ask. They didn't want anything from him, and he could not give them what they did not want.

What do you want? Psalm 37 declares:

*Seek your happiness in the Lord,
and he will give you your heart's desire.*

Seek your happiness. Seek it, look for it, from the Lord, from the Lord who is the source of all happiness, who is the source of all joy. Seek your happiness in the Lord and the Lord will give you your heart's desire.

But they didn't believe. They couldn't get past the offense. They couldn't let go of ... What is it that they could not let go of? Their pride? And Jesus was surprised.

Jesus was surprised! Isn't it wonderful? Jesus was surprised! It is a reason for hope. What if they had written Jesus off as they did and Jesus were to say to himself: "I'm not surprised"? What if Jesus were to consider your stubbornness or my inconstancy or our faltering efforts as faithfulness, and say, "I'm not surprised"? Jesus' surprise means he expects more from them, wants more from them, wants more for them!

May it be joy for us to be reminded today how much Jesus expects from us, how much Jesus wants for us, nothing less than our happiness, nothing less than our wholeness, nothing less than the shalom which is our happiness, and God's.