

“Faith in the Face of Rejection”

During my knob year at The Citadel there were many times I had to navigate through tough terrain. One of those times came when an upperclassman named Sgt. Walters approached me during dinner formation and asked me what I was carrying in my hand. My response was that I had Bible study after dinner and that I was carrying my Bible. His response was to deliberately knock my Bible out of my hands and to make sure I heard what came out of his mouth next, “Don’t you know Jesus Christ is dead?!” I was stunned. I had never encountered such disrespect and hate towards my beliefs. Yet, here I was staring back at a face full of hate.

Two questions arise from my exchange with Sgt. Walters and the reading this week. First, why do people reject Jesus? What did Sgt. Walters gain from doing what he did? Is it that people just hate what they don’t understand? I wasn’t even teaching or preaching the Bible, in fact I was just holding it in my hand. Perhaps we can learn something from the text this week that may give us the answers.

In Mark 6, Jesus’s fellow townspeople are initially astonished at his teaching in the synagogue, but then begin to wonder how all this could come from Mary’s boy, the boy they had grown up with. Then they completely reject him. The Greek word translated “took offense” in 6:3 is used elsewhere in Mark to depict those who begin but then fall away, those who start walking but then stumble, those who become deserters. Their expectations of Jesus are stopped by their inability to see that Jesus couldn’t be anything more than a hometown kid, putting on a show. Their preconceived notions prevent their entertaining the thought that Jesus could be the embodiment of God’s promised rule. And so, a group who could’ve been called insiders along with Jesus’ family turn out to be outsiders, skeptics and opposers to his ministry. Bottom line is when Jesus is measured by the criteria set by the world as to what a religious leader should be, he

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doesn't measure up. He's not successful or influential enough or prestigious enough to bring about a change of heart to the crowd.

The second question that arises is, does Mark's story tell us something about the need of faith, the necessity of faith before mighty works happen? In other words, can God act only when we pray for something and expect that something to happen? The answer is yes!!! Absolutely! And it appears to be the point of verses 5-6 and could be supported by his many miracles that Jesus performed in which the faith of the recipient is mentioned before Jesus's action. It is important to note here that Jesus will not force his miracles on a hostile, skeptical audience. It stands in direct contradiction to the character and will of Jesus to heal where there is unbelief. Nevertheless, Mark says he still lays hands on some and heals the sick. For example: the leper in Mark 1:40-41, the paralytic in 2:5, the hemorrhaging woman in 5:28, 34 and Jairus in 5:22-23. All had faith in Jesus's power and authority as the Son of God prior to his mighty acts of miracles performed. This is the same faith I showed in my altercation with Sgt. Walters. My faith in Christ calmed me and allowed me to pray for him and his unbelief rather than retaliate negatively.

Therefore, what we learn in today's text is this: the reality of rejection by those who do not believe must be taken seriously. The shaking off the dust from our sandals is our visible “testimony” to just how significant such a rejection is, but with a hope that a change of character might eventually take place within the unbeliever. So we must learn from the rejected experiences of the disciples. They do not go out in active ministry with a promise that everyone will hear the Word and will repent. They were not discouraged or surprised when doors were shut on them, or when they were laughed at or mocked openly to their face. So too we should not be surprised or discouraged when the same happens to us. After all, Jesus time and time again

Mark 6:1-13

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receives the same response from the Pharisees, his own towns people, and even some of his own family. Know you are not alone.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.