



SUNDAY SERMON

Living from the Inside Out

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Do you ever get the feeling that people don't really want you to change? Wherever you're starting from, try making a big life change and you're bound to lose some friends and have to redefine your relationship to others. I'm thinking of things like giving up drinking or smoking, becoming vegetarian or vegan, going through a divorce or beginning a new relationship. People thought they knew the old you, and sometime they just want the old you back.

I think one of the hardest life changes to deal with is the transition from childhood to adolescence to adult, and the sometimes . . . challenging relationship between parents and children through this period.

I don't have kids myself, but I remember going through this phase with my own parents: feeling like they expected me to be one thing, because they had always thought of me in one way, and how hard it was for them to accept the adult I was growing into. And since I've been lucky enough to work with young people at St. Columba's for many years, I see it with your kids too — the young person that I get to know on SCAP or in J2A is sometimes very different from the young person you know at home. Which makes perfect sense: when I was the youth minister, for the most part I started getting to know your kids at 13 or 14, when they are almost-adults. I always expected maturity out of them, and that's mostly what I got.

Of course, it helped that I never really knew them as children. But of course, moms and dads don't get to make a clean start like that--and sometimes its hard to see the adult they are becoming through all the memories of the child they were.

This is what Jesus experiences in the Gospel of Mark this morning: the people that he grew up among just can't understand the person he's become. Over the past few weeks we've heard scenes from Jesus' earliest ministry — he's been travelling the countryside close to his hometown, honing his skills as a teacher, and a healer, and most importantly, as a prophet.

Jesus stakes his claim as a prophet right at the beginning of his ministry: these are the first words he speaks, in Mark, chapter 1, verse 15: "the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Good News." Everything Jesus does later flows from that prophetic proclamation. Jesus' belief in God's kingdom is a rejection of the way the world is, a world driven by greed and built through injustice. In its place Jesus imagines a world of peace and abundance for all people.

Continued

DATE

Eighth Sunday after
Pentecost
Sunday, July 13, 2018

PREACHER

The Rev. Jason Cox

But then Jesus tries to take this message to his own hometown, to Nazareth — and the reaction is basically “Who do this kid think he is?” The Jesus that they know is just a carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James. He’s not a healer or a teacher, and he’s certainly not a prophet. Who is he to challenge the way things are? Because if you really listen to what Jesus is saying, it’s dangerous.

He’s challenging the religious authorities, about what you can and can’t do on the sabbath.

And he’s challenging the secular authority of Rome, proclaiming that there’s another king in town. The people of Nazareth knew from long experience that you can’t fight city hall — go along and get along and try not to get killed was their motto. So bring back the carpenter, because that’s all they need or want Jesus to be.

Now there isn’t anything wrong with being a carpenter — and in fact, you have to imagine that being a carpenter, a low-level laborer at the bottom of the Roman economy in Israel, shaped Jesus’ view of the world. He certainly seems attuned to the needs and problems facing the working class, and he draws his followers from among just those people: fishermen, laborers, prostitutes. But God did not need another carpenter. God needed a carpenter whose eyes were opened, a peasant with a vision of a world transformed, a man whose thirst for justice was born out of the injustice that he grew up with and saw lived out all around him every day.

We are always in the process of becoming - the person that God has created us to be. The path of following Jesus requires us to become that person: to change, to transform, to grow up. And it’s a life-long process. Really its about learning to live according to God’s values, instead of the world’s values. We look out and the messages we see in the world around us are all about what’s on the outside: how much money do you make? What kind of influence do you have? Do you live in the right house, wear the right clothes, know the right people? That’s what the world thinks is important. And it’s very easy to believe it’s true, to live our lives according to the world’s values, to live from the outside in.

But that’s not what God wants. That person isn’t who God needs. God wants a compassionate heart, a person who cares when others are hurting. God wants kindness, and generosity. God wants love, and understanding. These are the values that God has planted deep inside our hearts, and these are the values we are called to live out if we’re going to follow Jesus. God needs us to live our lives from the inside out — to become the real, authentic person God has created us to be.

Jesus’ authentic self was a prophet, not a carpenter. That’s the person God needed Jesus to be.

Who does God need you to be? How does God want to use your authentic gifts to participate in the transformation of the world around us — how does God want you to build the Kingdom of God? We can’t all be prophets, but we are all called to live out our lives according to God’s values. How does a lawyer, a homemaker, a non-profit administrator, witness to God’s Kingdom values in her life outside these doors? I can’t answer that question for you. But I know it’s a question that you’re supposed to be asking yourself everyday. That goes for priests, too.

The only way we’re going to make God’s kingdom a reality is if all of us figure out that question. And then have the courage to become the people God is calling us to be.

Amen.