

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA
8 July 2018

Mark 6:1-13

The Gospel reading for today makes me think of the origin of the word “Snob.” There is a story that places the origins of the word SNOB in the 1600’s. Up until the 1600’s Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England only accepted students who came from the British nobility, the children of kings, queens, dukes, etc. When Oxford and Cambridge universities decided to admit commoners as students in the 1600s, “each student was listed on the record by name and title. The commoners' names were listed with the Latin inscription, Sine Nobilitate, meaning ‘Without Nobility.’ The abbreviation was S. Nob.... The word ‘snob’ is still in use today.” (*Bits & Pieces*, June 25, 1992.)

In today’s Gospel we confront a great deal of snobbery. You may recall what I told you last week. The episode today closes a unit that began in 3:13 with the calling of the apostles and a trip home. That section ends today with a trip home and the sending of the Apostles two by two. In both cases there are recurrent themes of fear and disbelief. In the first episode the snobbery to which Jesus is subjected came from his own family. In the case today, the snobbery comes from the people in attendance at the synagogue when Jesus is preaching in his home town. In the first case, Jesus’ mother and siblings attempt to stop his preaching because of the severe criticisms of those who believed he was demon-possessed or mentally ill, perhaps in an attempt to protect Jesus and their own honor and reputation.

After that very unpleasant episode, Jesus continues his itinerant ministry by preaching in other Galilean villages, telling stories about farmers, seeds, and household items like lamps to teach about the Kingdom of God. In every village people would come out in droves to see Jesus and to bring him their ill people to heal. This Jesus of Nazareth has begun to get a reputation for being a mighty preacher and healer! In fact, Jesus acts with such power that he calms a raging storm, cleanses a man of his unclean spirits in Gentile territory, raises a young girl from the dead, and cures a woman of a severe illness that had made her life miserable for 12 years. Now, after this great period of powerful teaching and works of wonder (miracles) Jesus decides to come home again. And this is where our passage begins. Jesus is back again in his home town.

Mark tells us that “Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.” At first glance, it appears as though Jesus is going to follow the same pattern he has established as he arrives to all other villages: he is going to preach in

the Synagogue; the towns folk will come in great numbers, bringing their sick people; Jesus will heal the sick and engage in detailed teaching. Mark continues, "On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded." So far so good. Jesus has preached in the synagogue, many in fact came out to see him and hear him, and they are astounded. But, there is a major difference here. The people in his home town are not astounded because of the great works of wonder or the wise teaching per se, they are astounded because of the person doing the teaching. "They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' ***And they took offense at him.***"

Those at the synagogue take offense to Jesus because of who he is. And this is where the snobbery begins. They say to themselves, "Isn't this the carpenter?" Ramsay MacMullen states that "one's social pedigree would easily be known in the Greco-Roman world and that a description such as 'carpenter' indicated lower class status (*Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 384*)." He proceeds to give us a "Lexicon of Snobbery" filled with terms used by literate and therefore upper-class Greco-Roman authors to indicate their prejudice against illiterate and therefore lower-class individuals. According to this list, the upper class was composed of the rulers and governors, priests, retainers ranging from military generals to expert bureaucrats and merchants. The lower class was composed of anyone who made a living by working with their hands: peasants (the vast majority of the population), artisans, those who served others (maids, cooks, etc. The author calls them 'degraded') and the slaves (called by the author 'expendables').

Since Jesus was part of the artisan group, he was automatically considered inferior even to peasants. Now, since about 95% of the population was illiterate, unable to read and write, Jesus' wisdom was instantaneously held suspect. How can an illiterate artisan have such knowledge? He was over-reaching. He was attempting to speak like men of a higher status, men who came from a different social class and who were well-educated. This was too much for them. They are offended! In fact, according to various commentators, the snobbery doesn't end here. They call Jesus the "Son of Mary" which is in itself a put down. People are often called "Son of the father" as in "Jesus son of Joseph". Or as a son of a notable ancestor, such as "Jesus son of David", but the classification "son of Mary" may indicate an illegitimate birth. Because they thought so little of him, they did not seek his help. Mark tells us that Jesus, "could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief."

Whereas people in other villages came to Jesus expecting power, healing, and miracles, the people of his own town expected nothing, because they knew him to be a

nobody. They knew him well and they had no great expectations of him. In fact they treated him with great dishonor. He was a person “sine nobilitate”, without any nobility. So far, both visits to his hometown have resulted in great disappointment. During the first visit his family comes to rescue him because they think he has lost his mind. They knew him so well and they loved him so much that were afraid he was ill. They never expected him to do the things he was doing. They knew him so well they expected very little of him. During the second visit, the temple authorities knew his background and family tree so well that they expected nothing of him and in fact felt offended by him.

Lest we become too critical of the family and of the temple authorities, let me suggest that many people, including ourselves fall into one of these two categories. Some refuse to accept Jesus as the Christ. Even after hearing about Jesus, they have come to realize that Jesus is not relevant for them. He has nothing to say to their particular condition and to their life on this earth. There is another group that knows Jesus so well and perhaps loves him so much that they pretend to speak for him. They know how he behaves. For us Anglicans, for example, Jesus is a congenial fellow, who acts quietly and reverently, who intervenes in our lives in small measures, and who is controlled and sophisticated. Many of us come to church on Sunday mornings, but we have no great expectations of Jesus. We know how Jesus acts and we know that he expects nothing, demands nothing, and accepts everything. We come seeking his comfort, but not seeking his power or his healing.

How many of us came to church today expecting a miracle? How many came to this Jesus today looking for his power and wisdom? How many are thirsty for that refreshing water that has the power to quench our thirst forever? How many came to church today expecting conversion or physical healing? The truth is that we know Jesus so well, we expect very little from him! I invite you today to come to church hungry and thirsty for this Jesus. He has the power to act in mighty ways in our lives today, just as he had the power to heal and restore then, even though no one expected much of him. Come as thirsty and hungry beggars and he will fill your lives with his power. Amen!