**July 5, 2015 – 6th Sunday after Pentecost**

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Our Gospel reading for this morning tells two different but related stories about evangelism. Now I know that we Episcopalians have been known to shy away from that word, but sometimes we just have to talk about things that make us uncomfortable.

The first story is about Jesus. After traveling around Galilee teaching and healing, and developing quite a reputation, he fetches up in his home town of Nazareth. It starts out well. “Wow,” they say, “this guy is AMAZING!” But then it turns a little sour. “Hey, wait a minute! Isn’t this Mary’s boy, Jesus? What does he think he’s doing, talking to US like that? Why, we knew him when he was just a snot-nosed little kid, running around the village! And last I heard, he was still just a carpenter. Who does he think he is?” You get the drift.

Just as in last week’s Gospel, those around Jesus are asking, “Who is this Jesus?” But unlike his disciples, his hometown folks are not expecting great things from him. In fact, just the opposite. Jesus can’t possibly have anything to say to them because of who he is, not what is message is. Their minds are closed to the good news, and to the power of God that Jesus can show them. The text says that they were offended, but the Greek word *skandalidzo* means more than mere insult. It means to be caused to stumble or fall into a trap. They had fallen into the snare of their own small-mindedness.

The fact that the text says that Jesus “could do no deed of power there” certainly doesn’t mean that Jesus was unable to do miracles. In fact he did do a few healings. Maybe they were out of compassion for the sick people involved, or maybe there were still a few people in town who had faith in him. I really find it hard to believe that he held back on his deeds of power, especially those that helped people, which were most of them, in order to punish the people for their lack of faith.

Maybe a better way of saying this would be, “Because of their lack of faith, Jesus knew that no matter what he did it wouldn’t be good enough to break through their hard hearts.” I know that’s taking a fair amount of liberty with what’s in the actual text, but I’m not alone in that. By the time Matthew got through with it, that sentence read, “And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.” And of course, Luke, with his gift of storytelling, also embellished the story with the townsfolk trying to pitch Jesus off of a cliff. So I’m in good company.

The point is, he came to preach and to heal, and was rejected. So when he sent out the Twelve, that was part of his instructions. If anyone should reject what you have to offer, move on. This is where we get a little tied up in our evangelism efforts, and why many of us don’t think we’re very good at it.

Evangelism is more than just convincing people about Jesus. The word evangelism comes from the Greek (naturally) word *euangelidzó*, which doesn’t mean exhorting or persuading. It simply means announcing the good news. And the good news is that we have the opportunity to be in a relationship with God through Jesus in a way we never have before.

Because evangelism is about relationships. It’s about showing up. It’s about offering hospitality and receiving hospitality. It sounds simple, but in reality, those components of evangelism are what make it hard for us flawed and fractious human beings.

Let’s start with relationships. When Jesus said love God and love your neighbors, he was talking about relationships. Love God because God sought you out and loved you first. And then love your neighbors – all your neighbors – because…God sought you out and loved you first.

But that’s where it gets tricky. Some of our neighbors are just not that loveable. Or worse, we want to love them, but they hate us. I don’t know why, but these days it seems like hatred, bigotry, and fear mongering; and their less toxic but still nasty siblings, slander, sarcasm, and selfishness, are just a lot more interesting to most people than kindness, gentleness, or charity. And heaven forbid we should try to form relationships with people who are different from us.

But in order to do just that, we have to show up. We have to leave our pews and our parish halls and move out into the world where the people are. Jesus didn’t tell his disciples to just hang around in the hopes that people would come to them. He sent them out to where the people lived. And in going out, they ran the risk of being rejected, just as Jesus was in his own home town. But the risk doesn’t mean it’s not a good idea to go.

And finally, evangelism is about hospitality. This one seems obvious. We hold dinners for the poor among us. We welcome them to church on Sunday, and when we’re on our game, we talk to them at coffee hour. We proclaim our love of diversity on our web pages and church signs. Remember, “Wherever you are on your faith journey, the Episcopal Church welcomes you?”

These are not bad things. They’re very good things, and necessary parts of the Church’s mission. But what we fail to realize sometimes is that hospitality is a two way street. How comfortable are we, especially we Midwesterners, at RECEIVING hospitality?

Jesus sent the twelve out with nothing but sandals, the one tunic they were wearing, and a staff. No food, no water, no money, and not even another tunic in case it got cold. From the moment they set off, they were forced to rely on the hospitality of others. That must have galled many of them, who were used to being independent and fending for themselves as fishermen or tax collectors, or what have you.

In my own experience, although I don’t work on one of the reservations, the Diocese of South Dakota is primarily a mission diocese. In fact, fully half of the diocesan budget goes to fund the ten Episcopal missions on the nine reservations in South Dakota. So even though I’m not a mission priest, I have learned a lot about Lakota culture.

One of those things is hospitality. Hospitality is like air and sunshine to the Lakota, even when they have very little to share. As a white person, and as a white Midwesterner, my instinct is to not want to take what little these people have, but that’s one of the worst insults I could possibly offer. In denying the hospitality, I’m denying the relationship. And in denying the relationship, I’m denying our mutual humanity. But oh, it’s hard!

Not only is it hard, but it’s a little terrifying. Put yourself in those disciples’ sandals. What if no one takes you in? What if no one gives you food? In this century we are so self sufficient, so independent, that we chafe at the idea of depending on someone else, and yet, that’s what Jesus is telling us to do. Put yourself out there with nothing but the Good News, and trust in God to see you through.

Because that’s the final component of evangelism. Trust. Trust in God’s grace and care for us, and trust his message. Because if we show up and form relationships and accept hospitality, God will be there. If we tell people about what a relationship with Jesus means – joy, peace, love – they will hear it. Oh maybe not everyone, but many will. And even those who reject the message might hear it again later and finally know it for what it is – God reaching out to all of us in order to bring us home to him.

So let’s put on our apostles’ sandals and our tunics, and grab our staffs, and head out into the world. We need to risk rejection in order to bring God’s good news of salvation and redemption into a world that sorely needs. But one person will never reject us. Wherever we go, Jesus, our brother and friend, will be there, too, walking beside us.

Amen.