

July 4, 2021 6th Sunday after Pentecost

2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10; Psalm 48; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

“Doing God’s Work”

It comes as no surprise to me when I encounter an observation that seems to suggest that the world is broken. I hear this kind of comment on the news and in coffee shops and I’ve been hearing one version or another of the comment for most of my life. In the midst of this current Pandemic it seems that we have been witness to even more evidence that the ‘world is broken’. Some of this evidence comes from things to which we paid little attention prior to the various ‘lock-downs’ and we have been required to try to process this material without the benefit of the discussion circles which were part of our former life. The stress and grief we have shared as a community has had a tremendous impact on the way in which we think and that impact hasn’t always been positive. The comments about a broken world come, I think, because of yearning for something better, something healthier, something more wholesome.

As I write these words we seem to be on the verge of a return to a more ‘normal’ pattern of life. Restaurants and hair care are two of the many services which will once again be part of our lives and for that we give thanks. “Covid hair begone!” As much as we look forward to some of these things many of us realize that the life we left over a year ago has been changed in the interim. Whether it is the discovery of human remains in unmarked graves at Residential Schools, the exposure of sexual harassment in our military, the ways in which our police forces have sometimes abused their authority, or any of the other bits of news we have heard our lives have been changed. The world we left during our enforced isolation is different now. The phrase, ‘you can’t go home again’, has been on my mind as I contemplate our return to public worship because I believe that even though it will seem familiar some things will have changed. We see a similar kind of thing described in today’s Gospel reading as we encounter Jesus in that kind of situation when he returns to his home town after he had been launched into his ministry. The difference is it was Jesus who had changed - not his community.

Jesus had been sent into the world in order to ‘do God’s work’ of: restoration, reconciliation, and renewal. Having chosen Capernaum as his home base for this ministry there was much evidence that he was quite effective in this work. Peoples’ lives were greatly affected through contact with Jesus and so, when he returned to his home town, there was a level of expectation placed upon him. It turned out that the expectation was misplaced. The world he had left when he travelled to the Jordan River to begin the ministry to which he had been called may not have changed all that much but he had changed tremendously. Stories about the effects of his ministry had made their way to his home town. The comparison between the way in which he had been perceived and the way in which the news from away had pictured him caused a good deal of discussion. Unfortunately for the people of Nazareth the way God made things prevented Jesus’ ministry from having the effect it had in other locations because the

freedom to choose had been given to God's creatures. The people to whom Jesus had been sent rejected his offering. These were the people with whom he had spent a good deal of time as a child and so the rejection must have hurt and the ability of the town of Nazareth to experience the blessing of God in the way Capernaum had experienced it was eliminated. The power of choice is extremely powerful - it can even stop the hand of God.

We too have been away from our 'home town' due to the lock-downs which have removed us from our Church buildings. We have all been on a journey and we are about to return to our 'home towns' as we will once again gather with the familiar faces in a familiar location. I am looking forward to that event but I'm also somewhat aware of the fact that everyone will have gone through some changes and so to expect it to be the same as before will not be helpful. If we insist on everything going back to the way it used to be we may wind up rejecting what God wishes to do among us the way the people of Nazareth missed out on what God wanted to do among them. The work of God requires our participation for it to have an effect on our lives. As we re-enter our worship spaces I pray that we will open our hearts to the message of God for this new period in our lives because there is much work that God wishes to accomplish in this world and he will be asking for our help. What those issues may be we will discover as we journey but we can get some hints of the ways in which the process will take place by looking at the rest of today's Gospel reading.

After leaving Nazareth Jesus appointed 12 of his disciples to go on a mission trip. They were to do what he had been doing from the beginning of his public ministry. Those of us who are familiar with the story have probably noticed that this was always Jesus' pattern in God's work of restoration, reconciliation, and renewal. He was indeed an effective instrument in God's hands but he regularly gave that same responsibility and authority to those who had become his disciples. In this account we read how the disciples were given instructions which were designed to help them grow in their reliance on God's guidance and be effective instruments in God's work. As effective as they would be they were warned that not everyone would be open to their ministry and they were encouraged to not waste a great deal of time on those who were not ready to receive the message. There was a large amount of work to be done and only a few workers being sent into the field so they were to go where their work would be most effective. St. Mark tells us that "They returned with news of great joy that in God's name they were able to 'cast out many demons; and anoint those who were sick and cure them'" (Mark 6:13) I believe a similar process takes place on a regular basis in our congregations as Jesus appoints and empowers disciples to go into the world to do God's work. Sometimes it is to work in soup kitchens and sometimes it is to visit shut-ins and bring them some of the Good News and sometimes it is the countless other ways that God has provided for His work to be done.

As we have learned again over the past few months our world is in need of help in many different areas. There are, indeed, some signs of health and wholeness but there are also some things that are in

need of God's touch of restoration, reconciliation, and renewal. Jesus' technique of doing God's work hasn't really changed all that much. Jesus still commissions his disciples to go on mission trips and bring the message of God and the ministry of God into the world. Not everyone will be thrilled about this work so we are encouraged to go where we find levels of acceptance which allow God's plan to move forward. This work is done most effectively in pairs or small groups and will be among the invitations we are all offered. This offering comes in a variety of different ways and in all sorts of circumstances. Perhaps you are already engaged in doing God's work in the world and so you should continue those efforts. Perhaps you have been waiting to receive some marching orders so you should pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you are among those who think the message is for someone else so, I would suggest, you should pray for God to open your heart to the message that is meant for you.

The world is still in quite a mess and it is God's desire to: restore it to its original image, bring about a reconciliation between God and humanity and a reconciliation between humans, and to renew the face of the earth. You and I are asked to participate in that work and we are empowered by God's Holy Spirit to go into the world in Jesus' name. As we gather in our Church buildings for public worship once again in the, hopefully, near future I pray that we will be enabled to receive God's healing in our own lives and pass that on to others.

"God of peace, forgive us as we forgive each other for all the hurt we have brought into our lives. Let your healing love rest upon the wounds we have caused. Deepen our love in a new understanding for each other and for you. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ who carried on his cross our discord and our grief." (BAS p. 697)