

July 7, 2024
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

“Marvel at Jesus”

Mark 6:1-13

Is it possible to be too familiar with God, with Christ Jesus? I believe it is.

The people of Nazareth were indeed too familiar with God. Of course, we can reasonably cut them a bit of slack because Jesus for years had not in any way presented Himself to them as such. But now He was proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of heaven, doing miracles and prophesying with authority...and they aren't having it. They are hearing His message, but what they supposedly know about how things are won't allow them to receive Him as the Messiah He truly is. He is too familiar to them.

Mark then writes words of tragic judgment, *“And he marveled because of their unbelief.”*

Remember, ultimately it is unbelief in Christ that condemns a person. Mark describes Jesus as marveling that these people who knew Him so well, knew Him so little. They were so familiar with Jesus that they could not accept His message, His authority, and perhaps ultimately the salvation He came to deliver to the world.

We are the household of faith. We have been brought near to Christ and His salvation. We have been made familiar with His love, grace and mercy and this is a blessed gift of God. Yet, because of our fallen nature, we too run the risk of allowing ourselves to become “too familiar” with Jesus.

Here is what I mean. We rightly know that the Bible is the Holy Spirit inspired, infallible Word of God Himself handed down to us for our salvation. Yet how many of us think we know it, or know enough, so that we don't really have to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it—this Word that God Himself handed down to us? How many of us hear the reading begin in the Divine Service and think “I know this one” and tune it out? How many times over the years do you think I have seen “good Lutherans” decide that during the reading of the Word of God is a good time to have a conversation, read the bulletin, or head to the bathroom?

Or, every week I stand up here proclaiming the best news you could ever hear—forgiveness of sins in Jesus, reconciliation with God by grace, eternal life in paradise—and how often have you thought, “Oh, this again”?

Or, have you ever come up to receive the Lord's Supper and you kind of regard it as...routine? Just something we do?

Now, I think stuff like this is going to happen once in a while because we are imperfect children of God who stray at points and have trouble staying focused. That's just part of being sinner and saint all at the same time.

But if we allow such familiarity that makes Jesus common to us become our norm, well that is truly dangerous, because it kind of leaves Jesus in the same place in our life as was the case for the people of Nazareth—He is just that Jesus guy who is hanging about in our lives. He's not front and center. He's that Gospel guy who does the forgiveness of sins thing, sure, but we don't really treat Him as anything special.

This is truly a risk for us. Our sinful nature exalts the self. Idolatry—not letting God be God—is the number one sin in Israel's history and all of humanity's history. If we become so familiar with Jesus that we make Him just another part of OUR life, He isn't so much our Lord, but that Savior hanging out somewhere in the wings. We dare not take God's incredible love, grace and mercy in Christ for granted lest, after dying and rising to redeem us from sin, death

and the devil, we turn away from Christ in favor of the world and leave Him staring at our back, marveling because of our unbelief.

Scary picture, huh? It truly is.

The good news is that such folly is easily avoided...by getting familiar with Jesus Christ, the Savior and King He truly is. And oddly enough, you can do that best by still keeping yourself in the mix, as in getting familiar with what He has done and still does for you.

Be receiving Him in His Word. Old Testament, New Testament, it doesn't matter. But don't receive it just as a familiar story. Receive it and ponder it as the revelation of how God has worked throughout history for your benefit. See how it reveals God's nature as longsuffering steadfast love, yet a God who will reject those who steadfastly reject Him. See how it all leads to, points to, Christ crucified and risen that you would be redeemed for eternity! Let it hit home in your soul, and go back for more often.

Be pouring out that soul to God in prayer. One of Nazareth's problems was that Jesus was just a neighbor, nothing more. You know He is the God of creation, salvation, who has come to you and called you into union with His divine self! You are invited to share all of yourself with Him: your sins for His forgiveness, your fears for His comfort, your needs for His supply according to His perfect will. He loves all of your being and urges that you spend time in fellowship with Him—not just as some being hanging out in your life at times, but as the Creator/Father who dearly loves you, His child.

Be more than familiar; know and experience and trust in what Jesus is doing—present tense—in your life. Many people look at Sunday as a time to go to God's house and hang out with Jesus for a while. He's familiar. He's uplifting. He's saying good things. He's making me feel good about myself. And then, like He is just any other friend, you say goodbye and head home again.

Jesus does stuff here. He in real time by His promise forgives your sin in the absolution. He washes you through His death and resurrection continually as you recall your Holy Baptism. He feeds you in real time His resurrected body and blood that is the attained-by-the-cross forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. You don't just hang out with a friend here. You are made holy and eternal by God in the ways God has promised here.

And it most certainly is not just here in church. Here we don't just get familiar with Jesus, we get very intimately bonded with Him by the gifts He gives. Walk with that bond into your week knowing that Your life is wrapped up in Him. In that serve not yourself as your sinful nature wishes to do, but under such grace serve Him to His glory in all that you do. Whatever your occupation, vocation, roles or activities, know that He is always right there with you, His angels protecting you, His Holy Spirit uplifting you, His presence sustaining you through all of it, even when all of it passes away.

This is indeed a challenge, I know. Life happens, and the cares and anxieties of this world constantly demand your attention. Satan uses that to encourage you to push Jesus into the place of "that familiar guy" hanging out in your peripheral while you concentrate on the "important stuff." Yeilding to such temptation relegates Jesus to being something lesser and lesser, until maybe you've turned so far toward the world you really aren't seeing Him at all...because He is staring at your back, marveling at your unbelief.

Folks, that is too scary to contemplate and the solution is simple: repent, repent and believe the Gospel! Jesus isn't your neighbor. He isn't your copilot. Jesus is the God of your salvation; Jesus is your life itself.

If you're considering Him anything less, just stop. I mean, literally, stop whatever you are doing, stop thinking about the world, stop obsessing about you and your life, and run to Him and get real familiar with who He is for you. In Him you find God for you, and marvel at His salvation. Amen.