

A Sermon on your “Haters”

Mark 6: 1-6

Jesus travels twenty miles Southwest of Capernaum to his Fatherland. In Mark Chapter 6, Jesus enters into the local church and begins to teach in a way that astonishes those in his hometown.

Rather than get excited or celebrate, their response was, “Is this not the carpenter’s son? The son of Mary?” His family is familiar; we know his people. They “took offense at him”. They were scandalized by him. They tripped over him. God’s supernatural hand is on Jesus and those in the fatherland have a choice in how they will respond, and they chose to be “haters.”

One of our neighbors at neighborhood bible study when looking at this passage asked: “Why when he is doing good do they treat him this way?”

A) Jealousy/envy at who he has become. He is more mobile. He has gathered people from all different backgrounds around him. He speaks as one who has authority.

B) “Like crabs in a barrel.” “Misery loves company.” Moving forward, walking into what God intends for our lives, we cannot be surprised when someone shows up from our past, or we get a phone call from a family member trying to pull us into their mess. There is some kind of intuitive ability that transcends geography which allows those familiar with us to intuitively know when we are beginning to break free of what has been, and they will use every means necessary-guilt, shame, verbal abuse-to try to yank us back in to where we’ve been.

C) But something even deeper...Jesus’s “haters” are allowing human constructs to dictate the limits of their lives, rather than allowing God’s transforming power to change their lives. Jesus’s “haters” are the maintainers of the status quo. It’s not that they don’t see the change coming. They acknowledge that the transforming power of God is resting on Jesus and presides in their midst. But they are resistant, deep down to the change that his presence entails. We don’t know all the reasons for this resistance as we sit here this morning, but we do know that

the patriarchal, geographically-bound system of first-century Galilee was working for somebody.

Let me bring it home with a modern-day example. A question that has been circling around the periphery of our nation's media is, "Who is burning black churches?" And along with that question is, "Why isn't main stream media-NBC, CBS, Fox-covering more deeply the string of seven black churches being set on fire across the South?" So far, none of these has been officially labeled as a "hate crime". But can we be real in here this morning, that these are hate crimes, that these are the results of actions of "haters".

And it would be a mistake for us to see this as the visceral reaction of a few fringe radicals, acting simply on raw emotions of hatred. The burning of black churches following the shootings in South Carolina is systematic and systemic. Remember, "The structures, culture, and defaults that define and maintain a human system are tenacious." And racism is not simply a plague upon the human heart, it is also a systemic reality of this nation's social fabric. And remember, it took a long time for racism to develop into a self-reinforcing system. It took 400 years in this nation. And finally, remember that the racial system is working fine for somebody, and that will explain both who is burning black churches and why major media outlets are silent.

I am not a conspiracy theorist. Conspiracy theories are the tool of the disempowered. But our text this morning of Jesus encountering the haters in his father's land, and their reasons for hating, demands that we pay attention to the haters in our own land and their reasons for hating: Haters are simply reinforcing a status quo that benefits them in some way.

And then Jesus says, "Prophets are not without home except in their father's land, among their own kin, and in their own house." Radical statement: This is an honor and shame culture, same in our southern culture here in Richmond. By making this statement, Jesus is saying that he is no longer subject to the rules and human constructs and social codes of his day. He is no longer bound by the socio-cultural norms of his society.

He is identifying as a prophet, which means that the society no longer dictates his words and actions, the way society dictates every word and action of the hater. But now Jesus's identity, his words and speech, flow freely from the Spirit of God,

who he serves. Jesus, in the framework of Dr. Martin Luther King, is not a thermometer, being shaped by the honor or shame accorded him by public opinion, but rather he has become a thermostat who changes the temperature around him by crying out, "Thus sayeth the Lord!"

And yet and still the text tells us: "He could do no deeds of power there", because the people were clinging so hard to what had been, working so hard to maintain the status quo, they were not open to God's power to transform their lives. We must be capable of opening ourselves beyond the limits of what we've seen before and be open to the new horizons of possibility in God.

I don't care how long you've been on this earth, you have not seen it all. You have not witnessed all that God can do for you. God said to Sarah in her old age that she would bear a child and she laughed to herself. And I am not wishing a child on you at old age, but there may be a metaphorical new birth happening in your life, and for God's work in you to come to full nativity, you've got to let go of the human limits you have accepted for your life.

Finally, the text says that Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. Let's just be clear, in closing, about the nature of their unbelief. It wasn't that they didn't say the right doctrinal formula about Jesus. It wasn't that they weren't good, religious people. The nature of their unbelief was that they failed to believe in God's power to take hold of an ordinary human life and make it extraordinary. God could place God's Spirit on someone with whom they were familiar, and over the years mold, grow, and transform that person into someone entirely new, their messiah.

The haters couldn't understand, didn't want to understand, this fundamental reality of God in Christ:

"In Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new!" (II Cor 5:17).

