



# *The Westminster Pulpit*

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church  
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

## *“Welcome and Rejection”* Sermon on Mark 6:1-13

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Our second scripture comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 6, verses 1-13. Hear the Word of God. **Our ears are open.**

*Mark 6:1-13*

6 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. <sup>2</sup> On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. 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! <sup>3</sup> Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and [Ho-sayz] Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. <sup>4</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” <sup>5</sup> And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup> And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup> He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup> He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup> but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup> He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup> If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” <sup>12</sup> So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup> They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

## The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

You know what I miss? I used to be a part of a community theater in my hometown growing up, and we would always do those words of welcome. The: “Welcome! Thank you for being with us tonight! You’re in for a great show! Silence your phone. Here are the exits. One intermission. Buy popcorn. Thanks again for joining us!” Those words of welcome always made me feel like I was in it. Like it was going down, and we were all in it together: the actors, the tech crew, the backstage people, and of course, the audience. The show could be amazing or could crash and burn, but no matter what, this is an experience we all share and we rely on each other.

Even the Welcome during Concerns of the Church just now, I was like, “Awww yeeeeaaah. Worship time, baby! We made it through the Confession Cycle and now it’s time for the scripture readings, sermon, and sacrament. Let’s go! This one’s for the Triune God!”

It got me amped. We’re all worshipping together. We’re all welcome in this place together.

I wish welcoming was always that easy.

The other day I was looking at Presbyterian Peace Fellowship’s take on the passage I just read, and they asked a really good question: where do we see ourselves in this passage, particularly in verses 7-13?<sup>1</sup> Are we the disciples, who are not taking much with them, who go out into the world and do good things for Jesus—or are we the people who do not welcome them?<sup>2</sup> Sometimes I feel like the disciples, but after this past week’s Junior High Mission experience, I felt more like the latter.

On Thursday morning, we met with Open Table Nashville, who do all kinds of good things for the homeless community. In particular, I really appreciate their advocacy work. We met with them for a learning experience, some of which was a homeless walk, where we walked to some places in our city where the homeless community often gather. Two of those places were the downtown Public Library off Church Street and the little park across from it. You know the one I’m talking about? With the puzzle piece mural?

It’s a place where the homeless community often hangs out.<sup>3</sup> I used to work at Room In The Inn, and whenever I was downtown walking in that direction, I would usually see some of my friends experiencing homelessness over in that park reading, resting, playing chess, telling stories, laughing.

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<sup>1</sup> Abby Mohaupt & Annica Gage & Aric Clark, “PPF Resource on Mark 6:1-13,” n.d., 2.

<sup>2</sup> Abby Mohaupt & Annica Gage & Aric Clark, “PPF Resource on Mark 6:1-13,” n.d., 2.

<sup>3</sup> “PPF Resource on Mark 6:1-13”. The themes of welcome and homelessness came from this resource.

It is a very small park, but it has very heavy surveillance. I think Open Table said it has the most surveillance of any park in Nashville. Open Table pointed out the cameras to us: “look there, there, there, there, there.”

The park was recently renovated and it looks great. However, during the renovation, 13 benches in the park and in the block around it were removed. Now there are some new tables and chairs, which are really nice, but are not necessarily a place someone could lay their head down for a nap.

I’d like to give the renovations the benefit of the doubt. Maybe the removal of the benches were not in any way meant to disrupt the homeless community who frequent the park. Maybe it was a stylistic choice. An aesthetic. Maybe you know someone who worked on the park and can vouch.

But I have seen park renovations like this before, and it makes me feel weary. I’ve seen a park where the homeless population gathered in Asheville, North Carolina where benches were removed or modified during its renovation. I’ve heard about these kind of park renovations from friends across the country who work with their local homeless contingency. I’ve seen bus benches with those little bar arches added to the middle. The little arch serves as a separator so at least two people can sit comfortably at the bench. These bus benches, in a space often occupied by the homeless community, also do not allow for anyone to lay down.

As I reflected on the architecture, the layout, and the surveillance of the park, I remembered the scripture from Matthew 25 we discussed during the Junior High Mission Week:

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me...just as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it for me.”

It’s hard to welcome the “least of these”, isn’t it? And, of course, doing so is not always black or white. In some ways, I can see how one may want to remove or modify benches in a park. Some of the homeless community are drinking heavily or using drugs. Sometimes when people are under the influence, their actions are unpredictable. A person passing through the park may have had a bad experience with a family member with an alcohol addiction and is triggered when they see a drunk man sprawled out on a bench.

But then we look at the root causes of why people in the homeless community might be using drugs or heavily drinking:  
Sometimes people in the homeless community drink or use drugs because they are prone to addiction and can’t find, or afford, the support they need.  
Sometimes people in the homeless community drink or use drugs because they are trying to numb themselves from trauma they have experienced and this is the only way they have seen people in their environment deal with trauma.

Sometimes people in the homeless community drink or use drugs because the idea of self-worth has been stomped out of them and how else would a good-for-nothing use their time?

How do we achieve safety for all? Compassion for all? It goes back and forth, it goes on and on. It's complicated. All of it is complicated. And though I can see the reasons for people wanting bench modifications and an extra sense of security downtown with top notch surveillance—ultimately, is it welcoming?

How do we show welcome to the homeless community? Well, we do it when we give to Oasis. We do it when we participate in Room In The Inn's emergency winter shelter program. These are essential forms of support. But what about the long-term?

Nothing would say "you are welcome here" more to me than affordable housing. The vast majority of people *want* housing, but if you are experiencing homelessness, the process to receive housing can be a long one with a lot of details, caveats, and hoops to jump through. There also is not a lot of housing that our beloved siblings who are experiencing homelessness can afford.

Now, creating more Affordable Housing can sound naïve, and I hear that. It's kind of like saying, "How do we stop war? With peace!"

Affordable housing. How do we even go about that?

I don't know, but I have faith that if we made it more of a priority as a city, as a nation, or as people of faith, I have faith that we could figure it out.

Nashville is good to the homeless community. We provide a lot of homeless services through the Mission, Room In The Inn, Oasis, Open Table, People Loving Nashville, Safe Haven, Launchpad, Neighborhood Health, Parks Center, the list goes on and on. These organizations by no means share all of the same opinions, but I bet if we listened to them, we'd have a place to start.

Affordable Housing is only a pipe dream if we keep it at a pipe dream. And again, it can sound naïve to think we can figure out affordable housing, but in the same breath, I do not want to amaze Jesus with my unbelief.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. We have to work together to find ways to welcome each other, even when it is tough and complicated. When we do not welcome others, that often leads to rejection.

Rejection. There is an emphasis on that in this passage. In Mark, this is Jesus' second rejection his hometown.<sup>4</sup> In the first chapter of Mark, we learn that his

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<sup>4</sup> Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2 edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 81.

hometown is Nazareth of Galilee. It's a small place.<sup>5</sup> The first time he is rejected there is in chapter 3. He goes home and a big crowd forms around him. Some people notify Jesus' family and they are like, "Jesus is out of his mind." And Jesus' family are like, "We gotta go get Jesus away from this crowd. When he looks bonkers, we look bonkers." Jesus does not appreciate them trying to remove him from the crowd, and viola, his first rejection in his hometown.

As a small aside, family here is ambiguous. It could mean people who walk alongside Jesus, like relatives and friends. It could mean the people Jesus was close with in his hometown.<sup>6</sup>

Anyway, that was the first rejection. Let's look at the second rejection. Why was Jesus rejected in his hometown—the place with so many loved ones and people who care about him? It's not quite explicit, is it?

Side Note: Can you imagine literally growing up with Jesus in your hometown? You know, you like him, but you also have reasons he gets on your nerves.

"Yeah, I know Jesus. He's all right. He's kind of out there, though. And he asks a lot of questions. Sometimes in school I'd ask him a question about an assignment and then he'd answer my question with a question and it's like, 'I just want to know what font size I'm supposed to use.'"

But in all seriousness, I wonder if the congregation was just too familiar with him.<sup>7</sup> I think they are amazed by his teaching and his deeds, but then they remember that they also have reasons in their head not to think Jesus is all that and a bag of chips.

"Yeah, his preaching is pretty solid, but this guy is never here anymore. He probably thinks he's too good for this town, so whatever."

"Yeah, he's a great teacher, but he could be around here more to help his family, so I'll take what he says with a grain of salt."<sup>8</sup>

And what does Jesus say to this rejection? "Prophets are not without their honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." Or, in other words, just like some of the prophets, I am not going to be taken seriously in the place I grew up. Jesus is amazed, and by the sounds of it, frustrated with their unbelief.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, 5 edition (Oxford University Press, 2018), 1831.

<sup>6</sup> Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 81.

<sup>7</sup> Lamar Williamson Jr, *Mark: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983), 115.

<sup>8</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII*, vol. VIII, The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 593.

Where are they looking for God? Through some kind of spectacle. Christ is right here, in our ordinary town.<sup>9</sup>

As Lamar Williamson, Jr. puts it, “in our context today, ‘[Jesus’] own people’ is best understood as the group that formally claims Jesus as its own...namely, the church.”<sup>10</sup>

We all know the Church at-large does wonderful work, but we aren’t perfect, nor do we claim to be. The Church has a history of rejecting others. We still do it today.

I had a friend who grew up in the Church. Loved it. Sang in the choir. Loved the people. Loved the mission. Loved coming to the table together. Loved God. My friend had a sense of belonging.

Church was home.

My friend came out and the congregation was not happy about that. Now I don’t know what the congregation’s displeasure looked like: was it most of the congregation? Was it just a few “prominent” members? Was it a few of the louder voices? I couldn’t tell you.

What I can tell you, is that my friend did not feel welcome, was deeply hurt, and stopped coming. My friend felt rejection from the Church.

We do this as the Church at-large sometimes. I know I’m guilty of it. The Church at-large says, we want young people. We want diversity. We want people who love Christ. Then when a young, diverse, Christ-follower is in our midst we as the Church say, “No, not like that. In fact, I feel weird about you being here—and it’s not a me, it’s you.”

Fast forward. My friend dies unexpectedly at a young age. I think the death was from, if I have this right, a heart attack. Where is the funeral? The church I was just talking about.

Feels complicated.

I attend the funeral. The pastor there calls my friend a peacemaker. I am intrigued. My friend didn’t always tell stories linearly, just bits and pieces here and there that I would collect. My friend was a peacemaker. What does that mean? I am leaning in to hear more.

The pastor was not there for the fallout between my friend and the congregation. My friend reaches out to the pastor. “Hey, can we get some lunch?” My friend and the pastor start to get lunch regularly and build a friendship. They bond over a shared sense

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<sup>9</sup> Jr, *Mark*, 117.

<sup>10</sup> Lamar Williamson Jr, *Mark: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983), 117.

of humor. My friend wants to come back. The pastor suggests that my friend helps with the youth group.

My friend helps with the youth group, attends the youth conferences as a chaperone. The youth love my friend. Slowly, my friend returns to worship services at the church.

This led to some reconciliation in my friend's hometown. Not totally, and not always in the way my friend wished it would look. It was gradual. I could see this reconciliation at the beautiful, complicated, and extremely memorable funeral. The way everyone spoke about my friend, the way they grieved my friend, the way they celebrated my friend was with their best foot forward.

Telling stories at the funeral leads to friend's gift being celebrated: the wit, the sarcasm, the dry sense of humor. The cooking. The telling it like it is. The side comments you laugh at that you know you shouldn't laugh at. The reality tv analysis. The uplifting. The belief in friends when no one believed in them. The wild stories like my friend's pants ripping when meeting the mayor of Atlanta. The random phone calls and hilarious voicemails. The singing. The dancing. The style. The consistency in checking in: "How are you doing?"

Those are great gifts.

Ashlee, my fiancé, is sitting next to me at the funeral. She did not get the chance to meet my friend. What does she tell me after the service? "I really wish I knew your friend."

The frustrating part is the Church *did* know my friend. The Church had good memories and insight into my friend, but because of Church's rejection, we as the Church at-large did not know my friend fully. In the later years of the Church's relationship with my friend, the Church knew my friend as being loving, but also as cautious and calculated.

My friend's congregation missed out on my friend's gifts. They missed out on the Holy Spirit working through my friend.

Jesus' hometown missed out on the gifts of Jesus. In verse 5, Jesus doesn't do much by Jesus' standard. Jesus does a little bit of healing and curing. But in Chapter 5 alone, Jesus sends out demons, heals a woman with a 12 year-old ailment, and brings Jairus' daughter—a 12 year-old girl—back to life. The woman with the ailment and Jairus had some form of faith in Jesus, yet the people in his hometown are in unbelief!<sup>11</sup>

This unbelief effects Jesus in some way. I don't know if effected his power, or if it just messed with his head and his heart, but directly following the rejection, he couldn't fully utilize his gifts for his people.

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<sup>11</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII, 591.*

Jesus modeled rejection for us, because as people of faith, we will reject and be rejected.<sup>12</sup> When Jesus was rejected, as frustrating as it probably was for him, Jesus moved on. “Nazareth, I’m out.”

And we know the story. Christ’s ministry continued.

Friends, take heart. These two rejections in his hometown did not ultimately stop Christ.<sup>13</sup> Let it not stop us either.

What do we do in the face of rejection? When we do not feel welcomed in our own downtown, do we collect our baggage and seek shelter in another city? Do we love on those who have rejected us? Any response is valid, but no matter what we do, God is with us as we move forward.

When we as the Church initiate rejection, then we must attempt reconciliation. Let us not put the emotional labor on the people we have rejected, and instead—even when it is complicated—work towards a full-hearted welcome.

Let it be so.

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<sup>12</sup> Mohaupt, “PPF Resource on Mark 6:1-13.”

<sup>13</sup> Jr, *Mark*, 115.