

"Responding to Jesus"

Mark 6:1-13

July 9, 2006

There was a history class that had been talking about important figures throughout history. The teacher was a Christian and had let that show through from time to time. On this day, she had brought a big red apple that she was using as a prize. At one point in the discussion she held up the apple and said, "I am looking for the name of the greatest man who ever lived. The person who gives me the right answer will receive this apple." Several hands went up immediately. The first was a little Italian boy who suggested Columbus as a possibility. An Irish child waved furiously and offered the name of St. Patrick. Neither proved to be the name the teacher was looking for. The next child called on was a Jewish girl. She said, "The greatest man to ever live was Jesus Christ." The teacher was amazed - she said that that was right but inquired; "I know you do not believe in Jesus as the Christ - why would you say that he was the greatest man who ever lived?" As she took the apple she said, "Actually, I think Moses was a much greater man, but business is business!"

Who is this Jesus that we get out of bed on one of the only days you could 'sleep in' in order to come and sit in hard pews and sing His praises? Who is this Jesus that we are taking 22 kids and 5 adults across the country to learn about and sing to in the July heat of San Antonio, Texas?

We see an amazing turn of events in the Gospel text as we see how people react to Him and why. If you remember from last weeks gospel text and come to this weeks we find that Jesus has just left the home of Jairus where He has raised Jairus's daughter from the dead. He comes to his home - presumably Nazareth (Capernum is often referred to the home of Jesus because that is often a home base for Him). His ministry centers around teaching so, when people have gathered in the synagogue, as was their custom, Jesus goes and begins to teach. And He is good - almost unbelievably good! The people have even heard rumors and reports of Jesus having performed powerful deeds - healing, casting out demons and the like. It is all great stuff! It is wonderful! The people should have been proud of the hometown boy who had done good. They should have been ready to list him among the great men of all time. They should have been more than proud - they might have seen the truth and worshiped Him. But they took offense!

It seems to me to be about the strangest thing in the world. Why on earth would they take offense at Jesus? And then I think of how we respond to Jesus. Why do we respond the way we do? Why aren't we more amazed - more willing to follow Him and shape our lives around Him? Why would we give lip service to believing in Jesus as one who not only raised Jairus's daughter from the dead but whom we say

rose from the dead Himself in order that we might have life? Why wouldn't we go to the ends of the earth for Him?

As we read this gospel text we might typically suggest that it was a 'small home town' problem where you come to believe that an expert is someone from at least 50 miles away. [Get volunteers -- try to find a couple of willing kids --- talk to them about school and grades and what they are going to do when they grow up. Suggest that maybe one of them will become the scientist that will cure the common cold and that the other will become the 54th President of the US.] Now how will we respond to these two before the cure becomes generally accepted and tells you how to cure you cold -- or when one comes to campaign for the presidency on a platform which promises to solve the problem of world hunger? ----- Would you be skeptical - would it be offensive? It might be hard to imagine that these hometown folk might make such an impact on the world.

Who is this Jesus, that he should stand there and teach us. He's just Mary's boy after all. Perhaps it isn't so strange that they should respond poorly to Jesus. Maybe it was just that they could not see Him in the role.

Actually I am not really that interested in why His home town folk responded the way they did. What I am concerned about is our response. How do we respond to Jesus? Why do we respond the way we do?

It is quite a number of years ago when a magazine called "Fast Lane" conducted a survey to find out whose lives its readers would most like to emulate. Lt. Colonel Oliver North placed first. Then President Ronald Reagan placed second. Clint Eastwood was third. Fourth place was a tie between Lee Iacocca and Jesus Christ. What a commentary! The names of the people mentioned really reveals how dated the material is but I suspect that even with different names inserted for the leading roles today, Jesus might still end up in a tie for fourth! Does that disturb or surprise you?

A young woman went into a Denver jewelry store and told the clerk she wanted to purchase necklace with a gold cross on a chain. The clerk turned to the display case and asked, 'Do you want a plain one, or one with a little man on it?' Of course everyone does not know - but ' just a little man'? How do we respond to that 'little man'?

I suspect that we do not have the same kind of reaction that His 'home town folks' had. We are not offended because Jesus is just the kid next door. But it seems that in our day more and more people are offended by Jesus or even the mention of His name. It seems that many more that in the past have simply decided to reject Jesus. Some revere Jesus among the greatest people ever to have lived. And others worship Him as the Christ - their savior and the savior of the world. I suspect that in this room there is a wide variety of reactions to Jesus. And within the variety of

responses are also great differences as to what you believe means for how you will respond - how it will be reflected in your life.

Jesus sent out His disciples with very interesting and specific instructions. I wish I could just give those instructions to our kids going to San Antonio - wear sandals and don't bother packing more than one tunic or change of clothes [pack light]. The really interesting part of the instructions has to do with how the messengers and the message concerning Jesus are received. If the message is welcomed - good and fine. If not, "shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." I am not exactly sure what that might mean for us as we respond to Jesus [or fail to respond to Him]. But what I do know is that Jesus has the power of life and there is healing and renewal for those who believe in His name. Jesus offers that to us and, one way or the other, we will respond. May you be filled with faith and live in His grace!

AMEN