

July 3, 2021

Ez 2:2-5; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Mk 6:1-6

We don't like feeling weak. Sometimes that weakness shows itself in a physical illness, or in a situation that we cannot control, or when we're misunderstood and unable to get others to see our point of view - don't you hate that! The world sets an expectation that we are entitled to have what we want, that we are jipped when things don't go the way we think they should, or that we should expect that people treat us always the way that we want to be treated. But really to have these expectations is to set yourself up for disappointment - things will not always go as we want, and people will not always treat us as we think they should.

Look at Jesus in the Gospel. He returns to his hometown. Nazareth was a small town of a few hundred people - everyone knew everyone. Jesus has been making quite a name for himself: miraculous healings, unbelievably wise teaching, voices from heaven acclaiming him as the Son of God. He should have been a superstar! We would expect he'd get a parade with a headline: "Home town boy makes good!" Well ... no parade, no big fuss made. They cannot see that Jesus can be anything more than they expected him to be. Instead of hoisting him on their shoulders we hear that *they took offense at him*. He just got jipped - he didn't get what in the worldly way of thinking he deserved, by the standards of our modern entitled culture **HE** is the one who should take offense. But he does not. In this scene we see the reality of the world: we don't always get treated the way we think we should. We also see Jesus' example of how to approach these situations and how to continue with a response of love and faith in God and not in the retribution, revenge, and "pay back" mentality that is preached to us by secular forces.

Instead of being outraged, Jesus is upset. He was amazed at their lack of faith. He didn't perform many wonderful deeds in the hometown - not because he lacked the power - but because they were not receptive. It was their unwillingness to accept what he had to offer that set up the barrier. It was their fixed ideas about who he was that got in the way of having true faith in him and asking him what they needed. This is the same thing with us. Jesus comes into our lives and our situation willing to give good things (as he was in Nazareth), but our lack of faith gets in the way. Our failure to accept him as he is, our failure to see beyond what we think he is, our

unwillingness to accept anything besides what we feel we are entitled to, sets up a barrier to him giving us what it is that we need from him.

St. Paul understood real well that things don't always work out like we planned, people don't always treat us like we feel we deserve. Jesus was rejected in his hometown, Paul was rejected ... in a lot of towns. Instead of blaming the foolish people who did not listen to the message of truth, instead of seeking revenge for the wrongs committed against him - he looks to God. He can't change what they are doing, and if he needs that change to happen in order to feel good, then he is always going to be sad. Paul realizes that he has his weaknesses, realizes that he is powerless over the way people will receive him. He realizes that the fact that he is able to even go on - as flawed as he is, and with so much against him - is because of the power of Jesus. Rather than critiquing Jesus for not giving him what he feels he is entitled to, Paul realizes that because he is open to the Lord, and believes in Jesus for who he is, Paul is going to get what he needs. He says: *Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.* His being content is not tied up in getting it the way he wants it, the contentment is in knowing that ultimately God is in control, and that when he joins himself to the power of God - then he finds strength.

This weekend we celebrate our nation's independence. It is a celebration of throwing off the influence of an outside power, and being free from bonds that were strangling our nation's growth and potential. We could learn from St. Paul and gain our independence from the philosophy of this world that sees freedom as doing whatever I want, that tells me it is ok to destroy another because they wronged me, and says you can only be happy if people and events do as you wish. To sign on to this is to sign on to a slavery to an impossible goal. Jesus offers us independence from this frustration. The same freedom he found in his hometown when he was rejected, is the same freedom St. Paul felt to keep moving on by the power of the Lord despite many obstacles. Let me tell you, it is the most liberating experience when you can release your needs for revenge and retribution and embrace with love even those who reject and persecute you. When you can let go of your needs to control what you cannot control, and leave the outcome to God. The world may see this as weakness ... however, if you open to what Jesus will give, you will respond to that claim as Paul would: *for when I am weak, then I am strong.*