

MODERN EIPHANIES OF OUR LORD
HIS BODY, THE CHURCH

People united to Jesus through faith -- People united to one another through God's Word.

Mark 6:1-6

TEXT: *Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

It's an important piece of information that has guided, or should guide, our church body for many years in the placement of graduates and in the development of call lists, both for pastors and teachers: ***Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor...*** Many times people like to think that it would be a good thing for their son or daughter, relative or friend, to be the pastor of their congregation, or a teacher in their school. However, even Jesus' own experience elicited the sad fact that is also summed up in the phrase: Familiarity breeds contempt. A family might be proud that little Johnny has grown up and become a pastor. But would they listen to Pastor Johnny when he is called upon to discipline Uncle Joe? Or teach and admonish his cousins?

What is revealed in this incident in the life of Jesus is that the true Family of God is not a blood relationship. It is a faith relationship. Christ's family can only be seen through eyes of faith. They are a people united to Jesus through faith; and, a people united to one another through God's Word.

Scripture makes it so clear and simple about whom the members of the family of God are. Paul writes in Galatians 3: ***You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*** Faith in Jesus cuts across all age, race and cultural differences. From Abraham to those of us who sit here today, we are ***all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...*** God commanded Abraham to circumcise, and He has commanded us to baptize. Abraham believed in the Christ who was to come as the Seed of the Woman, and we are baptized into the name of Jesus, the Christ who has come and merited God's favor in his own righteous life. God has declared all who believe in Jesus Christ, not just His sons and daughters, but as Paul says: ***If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*** An heir stands to inherit a fortune -- the fortune of his father, and our father, through Jesus, is God!

When Jesus preached these truths in his hometown where he grew up, to His own family, Mark writes: ***...many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.*** What we see here is that it is possible that many who might call themselves believers, even if they are related to Christ Himself, will not believe in Him at all. Even Jesus' miracles did not convince them! They questioned his doctrine: ***Where did this man get these things?*** (even though He preached from Scripture). And who is this Jesus-boy, this whipper-snapper from Nazareth who used to play with my kids to stand there and tell us that he is the Christ of God?

The Bible then says: ***He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.*** This brings up the question: Why couldn't Jesus do any miracles there? He does do a few, but Mark tells us that He could do no more. Why? Isn't Jesus God Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and Earth? Luke's account answers these questions for us and illuminates further what is only seen through eyes of faith. Luke writes: ***All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which***

the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Luke 4 His hometown family and friends hear his sermon and in anger and hatred take him out to the cliff to kill him. But Jesus does do a miracle and walks right away from them. That's why he couldn't do anymore miracles there -- they drove him out of town and out of their lives!

We cannot see faith in the hearts of people, we cannot see who the believers really are, and therefore, we cannot see the true family of God. But since being a family member is only through faith in Jesus, God's Word and Sacraments, the means the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain faith, are of the utmost importance to the family members of God. Not only are we united to God through the faith that the Holy Spirit creates through this Word, but by that Word are we united to one another.

Members of Christ's Body, the Church, do not despise preaching and God's Word, but hold sacred and gladly hear and learn it. This we can see. This gathering around the Gospel is the "epiphany" or revelation of where the Body of Christ is.

The Bible says: ***(Jesus) could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.*** Even Jesus stood in amazement at the unbelief of His own people. It must have hurt Him deeply to walk away from His relatives, former friends and neighbors with the thought that unless they would someday hear the Word, repent and believe, these people would go to hell. Yet there was nothing He could do since they didn't want him.

Is this not the same kind of hurt and amazement we often feel when we see people we know reject the Lord by rejecting His Word? People still like to be called "Christian" but they cannot stand to hear preaching. Jesus gives us His Body and Blood in the sacred meal and invites us: ***Do this in remembrance of me...*** and many consider it just a "church thing" -- something that they can trifle with and even despise for months and years. This disturbs us, especially when we teach our children, and some fall away; when we tell our friends and they smile and say, "let's not talk religion..."; when we see family members who are deceived by false teachers and their hearts are led away from God's Word and to the soul-destroying lies of Satan. It hurts!

Yet that does not stop the Gospel. ***Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.*** Since God's family is all who believe in Christ, the ministry of the Word goes on until the end of time, to accomplish what the Lord declares through the ancient Prophet Isaiah: ***...my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*** Is 55:11 God will accomplish His purpose -- that's a fact and a promise.

What happened to Jesus' own brothers and sisters, relatives and friends who did not believe in Him? Scripture reveals that some of them never believed. It also reveals that many did believe in him, but not until after His resurrection. What a joy it must have been for Jesus to see those who did finally believe come to faith! What a joy it is to Jesus for any one of us to believe on His name. What a joy it is for us who do believe to see our loved ones also hold to God's Word in its truth and purity, even though it is also a great sadness when we see anyone who does not.

WE cannot see faith, but we can see the fruits of faith and the fruits of no faith. What must we do when we see fruits of faith? Rejoice and thank God for that fellowship of faith. What if we see fruits of no faith? What of those who insist that they are Christians but their lives do not follow? Pray for them. Admonish them. Show them their sins and perhaps they will repent. Many times people have said to me, "Pastor, if we do that we will drive them away!" But the fact is that they have already driven Jesus away from their hearts and will be lost forever unless they repent and return to that blessed fellowship with Jesus and with one another through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Epiphany means "manifestation" or "revelation." Do you want to see where the Body of Christ, the Church is? See who is gathered together around the God's Word and Sacrament, for there God is taking care of his Body, the Family of Christ His Son -- now and forever. Amen.