

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Year B)

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*Mark 6:1-13*

*He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. 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! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.*

*Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 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.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

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Change is hard. Change is confusing. Change is disorienting. Perhaps I'm a little sensitive to this truth at the moment as Tricia and I are still adjusting to the change of moving from Long Island to Lexington. Yesterday, Tricia and I spent several hours arranging our new furniture in our living room. I have recently inherited a set of couches, a dining room table, and a china cabinet from my parents. We changed things around, trying one arrangement only to switch it around and try it another way. After a while, we simply sat on the couches and looked at each other with exasperated faces, frustrated that we couldn't figure out this puzzle. Like I said, change is difficult.

Fortunately, we're not the first ones to discover this truth. Back in 1968, a man by the name of Fred Rogers understood this. And although change is tough for everyone, Mr. Rogers understood that this was especially true for children. In our early stages as a child, our worlds are changing so fast. And not only our world, but our bodies and our minds. Each day is different and the change is relentless. Mr. Rogers understood that children need a space where they are welcomed and valued and honored within the perennial seasons of change.

And so, on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1968, the pilot episode of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood debuted on National Educational Television, the predecessor to PBS. And, of course, the topic of the first show was "change." As the trolley takes the viewer from Mr. Rogers' living room to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, we discover that King Friday is very stressed out because someone called Lady Elaine has been making a lot of changes in the kingdom. King Friday doesn't like the changes one bit and so he sets up a border guard in order to try to keep the change at bay. And, in another bit of brilliance on the part of Fred Rogers, the episode does not resolve itself. At the end of the episode, King Friday is still worried about the change and we are left with a safe space in order to talk about change.

Well, the Bible has a lot of change in it. And today's passage is no exception. Jesus had been on a roll. Since you and I began our journey together on June 17th, we have watched Jesus be successful at quite a lot. He has cured a man with a withered hand. He has spoken several beautiful and curious parables. He has commanded a storm to stop its wrath upon the Sea of Galilee. He has healed the Gerasene demoniac and cured a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. And, as if that weren't enough, Jesus brings back a young girl who was at death's door.

But all that comes to a grinding halt in chapter six of Mark's gospel. All the successes that Jesus has enjoyed have hit a brick wall. Something changes. He goes with the disciples to his home town and the change is just too much. Scripture tells us that he could do no deed of power there, except cure a few people with stomach bugs. That's right, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the very son of God, *failed!*

Furthermore, it seems as though he was not the only person having trouble. Apparently the disciples were running into some unfriendly situations and Jesus instructed them that sometimes you just have to shake the dust off your feet and move on.

Friends, I believe that today's passage is about change and how we are called to adapt to it. You and I are called to be flexible with one another and to learn how God is calling us to minister to and with one another in these seasons of change. I know that there are some things that worked for me as a pastor in Shelter Island that are going to fall flat on their face here in Lexington. And there will undoubtedly be things that didn't work in Shelter Island that will work here. Perhaps you too know what that feels like. The way you interacted with your spouse 20 years ago isn't cutting it here and now. The new job requires things that you didn't have to do in your old one. The spouse has died and you don't know what to do. Your circle of friends is changing and you don't know how to cope.

We all know what it's like to come to a new place and get disoriented. And what's most important in rough seas, like the one the disciples endured with Jesus just a few weeks ago, is that we have something to keep us anchored and grounded in something bigger than us. I think that was the reason Mr. Rogers created his monumental TV show. He understood the importance of a community where people are loved for who they are and can find a safe space to navigate life's changing courses. I see a lot of parallels between that and what we are called to do and be as the Church.

Amid life's changes, we are called to be a Christ-centered community where people are welcomed relentlessly and loved ferociously. And the way this church did that in 1959 isn't cutting it in 2018. At times, as the Church in the 21st century, we can feel like Jesus did in today's passage and wonder why nothing seems to be working. The first five chapters of Mark's Gospel can feel a bit like what we often call "the good ole days," you know, when the young families and children were running around everywhere and the money flowed and the pews were full. However, today, we often feel like chapter six, when things come to a crashing halt.

Friends, I don't pretend to have any easy answers. I do not have a magic wand that will make all the young families reappear. Things change and we have to try new things while simultaneously remaining faithful to Jesus Christ. It's scary, I know. But I know that we're not alone. We are in good company. Jesus Christ has carried us thus far and he has no intentions of letting us go.

Together, let us take a cue from Fred Rogers and seek to be a place where people can find safety, love, and acceptance amid the craziness of this world. And that might mean going to new places and trying new things. And those new things will come with their successes and those new things might also come with their failures. And when, not if, the failures come, let us shake the dust off our feet and keep

**Rev. Stephen M. Fearing**

**Beaumont Presbyterian Church**

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moving, following Christ to where he would lead us, to whatever neighborhood his message needs to be heard.

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.