

“How Firm a Foundation of Liberty & Justice For All”

B Pentecost 6, Mark 6:1-13

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Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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REJECTION at HOME

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

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

The Mission of the Twelve

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

WHAT DID YOU MEAN, JESUS?

What on earth is this about? This passage that conjures up funny and cranky images? Go out two-by-two, into the towns and villages all around, and spread the message of love for all people. Take very little with you—barely a knapsack on your back!

If you’re welcomed warmly, join them for a glass of sweet tea on the porch, sit in the rocking chairs awhile and shoot the breeze. But if they don’t! If they don’t invite you to come on in and sit a spell; or ask more about this message of “the good news of Jesus Christ”—this Kingdom of God description—well then.....

Turn tail. Shake the dust off your feet and don’t let the door hit you on the way out! Your message is not welcome here and you shouldn’t waste your breath.

That doesn’t sound like Jesus!

Have you ever puzzled over this passage? I sure have—for many years—and I could not find much about it in the commentaries! Scholars seem to avoid it like the plague.

I puzzled over this all week long and life itself provided plenty of material for looking at what Jesus

might want US to understanding from this today. Here and now.

SIGN – tell story of it

We believe:

Black lives matter

No human is illegal

Love is Love

Women’s Rights are Human Rights

Science is Real

Water is Life

Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere

Tell story – LOVE STILL WINS! As of today, it’s still there, not defaced or torn down.

HATE HAS NO HOME HERE

In our own yard, we have a sign that says: “Hate has no home here.” That sign has actually been there awhile! It was stuck in the ground for the first couple months, but we’d find it leaning over or swaying in the breeze at times.

We were sure that someone walking by on the street just couldn’t resist the urge to pummel it and sort of knock it down. Then one day, I watched at the someone

did just that. Only, it wasn’t a pummel with a hand or a shoe, but a cloven hoof!

A deer was vandalizing our sign! Not out of spite, but because it was in the way of her grazing and she didn’t let that stop her! There was that hoof—right in the middle of the metal frame that was holding up the sign.

So, Clarke hung it on the fence of the wedge out front and it’s been fine ever since. Even though it’s on a major driving and walking corner of the town, right by the post office, it has not been touched.

That gives me hope! Maybe it’s TRUE! Maybe hate does not have a home here in our beautiful vista town. Even if some with mischievous or evil intent insist on messing with the other sign.

CHOICE IS OURS

We have a choice to make in all this. We can just give up and let it go—quit trying to put up our signs. Or, we can keep resisting with love. Painting new words and symbols on permanently. Walking the walk as well as talking the talk.

We can Highlight the positive. De-center the hate. Refuse to fall into the never-ending division. The pulling into camps—even *within* our own families or congregations or communities.

Friends in town responded to the news of the sign with words of wisdom:

I'm so sorry to hear about the sign. Hate is real and it's here. As our former first lady said, when they go low, we go high. I do believe that love wins in the end.

That's disturbing news about the sign. I'm so sorry. But that doesn't mean 'they've won'. That means there is much opportunity for teaching, healing, & hopefully transforming hearts. Hang in there.

Another suggestion came from a church member: Eat lots of ice cream! Why? Because some businesses stand up to intimidating acts of hate and racism, and proudly post their signs and banners—in spite of it all, and in spite of repeated vandalism of those signs. Eating ice cream = an act of peaceful resistance!

We can do other acts of kindness and resistance. Voting our values! Spending our hard-earned money at businesses that you feel stand for Jesus' Justice and God's love and inclusion for all.

CHURCH HAS A VOICE

“He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²On 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! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary^[a] and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?”

Our church, in our hometown, has a voice and a choice in all this, as well. What will Jesus and the disciples

find here—in our berg—when they come with the Good Jesus News?

Who are we in this chaotic world—where simple messages of love and acceptance are torn down and defaced? How open are we to Jesus' true message that God's love is for ALL and not just some—who believe the way we do?

What dust needs shaking off of us, that we might see more clearly what God is wanting to do with us—in this time and place. What message do we convey to the community—far beyond any banners and signs we might try to post—about who we are and what we believe?

“Who are you, CUCC?” That question might be asked a little spuriously. Or at least, curiously!

“We've know you all along. All these years—141 years to be exact! We've prayed for those who “go to that church!” We've been concerned.....”

Talk about rejection! I think Jesus gets this. I think Jesus walks this Way with us.

What message are WE disciples of? If Jesus Christ himself, commissioned us—today. Sent us out, two-by-two, or four-by-four (!)—if we were dense and needed that, of course! What would our message be? How would we convey it? How would we and that message be received?

Our mission statement:

As followers of Jesus, we are committed to exploring together Jesus' teachings, his actions, and his justice, to better love, respect and welcome all people."

FLAGS OF MANY KINDS

FLAGS—out of town folks asking about all the flags on our highways. They referred to them as “pretty partisan.” I responded that they’re not partisan flags, they are American flags! And as long as they are flying for the true values of this country—past, present and future—of true liberty and justice for ALL—I’m good with them!

But All has to mean all, y’all! And sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes our country’s laws, limits and restrictions do not lead to liberty and justice for all—no matter who or what color or where you are on life’s journey. And that means one thing:

We have to keep trying harder. We need to live up to our own ideals and values. I decided, the other day, while looking at ALL those flags flying from Salida to Buena Vista, that instead of worrying that the intentions behind those who put them up **might** be something other than “liberty and justice for ALL,” that the flag itself is a good reminder that we’re still working that direction.

I am going to try—whenever I see those flags—to think of Jesus’ words and mission from this story in the Gospel of Mark. To see the flags as a reminder to pray and “go out and spread the gospel of Love” in my hometown and every town around.

To pray for our country and *all* it’s people—in all our great diversity, history and background—no matter where we came from and how we might be alike or different from one another.

To pray that we might truly be “united.” In common purpose and vision—those of us who are people of faith, looking to our own faith as a firm foundation. Starting there, being sent out by the One we follow, to share the good news that God’s love and this land are for every one—Yes, this Land is your land, this land is my land!

And, if that prayer and that message are not well-received—as those first disciples found at times on certain days—our prayer can then be to “shake it off!” Don’t let our efforts cease or our spirits be discouraged.

To find a good response—maybe a little red paint proclaiming love in a more permanent way.

In our hometown, we see flags flying along the road or in people’s yards and you’re not sure of the spirit behind them—what’s the message they’re trying to convey—(there’s a Confederate flag just down the road from me that I drive past often and it makes me want to cry—for also just around the block from me is a family with two kids who are black, and they ride their bikes past that hurtful symbol.)

Pray for those who fly them. Pray that God’s unconditional love for all creation will be symbolized in whatever is waving and lived out. Ask the Holy

Spirit to use them and their message to change hearts and unite us as humankind rather than divide.

Ask yourself what assumptions, prejudices, suspicions and fears do WE need to “shake the dust” off of? Insider ourselves, our neighborhoods and our spirits?

On this Independence Day, let us celebrate our freedom. Freedom from control by others and of others. Let us rejoice in the agency we ALL have to love justice, do kindness and walk humbly with our God in the best way we know, being guided and led by the Spirit of God.

John Pavlovitz: This is a golden moment for the vast, sprawling army of good people who believe in the beauty of diversity and in a fully accessible America to speak unequivocally—on our social media profiles, at family gatherings, in our church meetings—and most of all, in the voting booth.

We don't need to convince or coddle or win over hatred, and we don't need to outdo it either.

We need to outnumber it.

We need to outlast it.

We need to outvote it.

We need to outlove it.

In our Christian tradition, we do that by gathering around Christ's Table –often, in remembrance of him and invoking his presence here and now among us. No

matter who you are or where you are on Life's journey, you are welcome here.

So, come as you are. You are Enough. Amen.