

Seeing Anew
Mark 6:1–13
Sunday, July 7, 2024

Let us pray: Show us who you are, Lord, and who you are calling *us* to be, in Christ. Amen.

I just got back from two weeks of vacation, and one of the things that we did in that time was take our kids down to Pensacola, FL, where I grew up. They had never been there before, and I wanted to be able to show them where I lived, where I went to school, all the places that played a part in making me who I am today. I hadn't been there in about 17 years, so I've been gone almost as long as I lived there, and what I found was that the town has changed *a lot* since then.

When we first started planning the trip, Jen was looking for a house for us to stay in through Air B&B. She found a place that she thought looked pretty good, but when she showed it to me, I took one look at where it was and said, "Oooh...we can't stay there. That is *not* a good part of town." She said, "Really? Because all the reviews say it's great." So I asked a friend of mine who lives down there, and she said, "Oh, no, that whole area has been redeveloped and totally transformed. It's actually really great now!" And it was. It was nothing like how I remembered it.

That was actually the case for a lot of the places we went. We drove by the elementary school I went to; a small school, Kindergarten through 5th grade, two classes for each grade, so it only had twelve classrooms. But when we drove by, that building that *I* went to school in had been torn down and rebuilt into this enormous two-story building that was in a totally different place than the original school. I didn't recognize it at all. The kids were like, "Whoa! You went to school *there*?" And I said, "No, that is *not at all* where I went to school!"

We drove by the different houses that I lived in growing up, the houses where my grandparents lived, and they were nothing like I remembered. They all looked so *bad* now. The yards hadn't been kept up or they had been painted weird. I found myself almost apologizing for them. "This was my mom's parents' house, but it didn't look *anything* like this back then. It used to look so much nicer."

We went downtown, which is *so nice* now. There's a baseball stadium and all these great restaurants, none of which was there when I lived there. So much of it I didn't even recognize. I remembered it one way, but it was not at all that way anymore. And what I found was, I was seeing the town as it *was*, not as it *is*. "This is a McDonald's now, but it *used to be* where I went to see movies." "The school is here now, but it *used to be* over there." This place that was once so familiar to me, I found that I didn't really know at all anymore.

Mark tells the story of Jesus going back to his hometown. A place that would have been so familiar to him, with people who *knew* him; had known him since he was little. But what we find out is that they didn't actually know him at all. They hear him teaching in the synagogue, and they say, "Where did he get all this? How is he *doing* all this – healing people and casting out demons? Isn't this the carpenter, Mary's son? Isn't this the little boy who used to run around here playing in the streets? We know his brothers and his sisters! And now he's this big teacher or prophet or *whatever* he's saying he is? No, this isn't the person that we *know*."

And it says that they *took offense* at him. The Greek word Mark uses for *take offense* is *skandalizo* – it's where we get the word *scandal*. But it's not quite the same as a political scandal or a celebrity scandal. In the Greek it literally refers to a snare or stumbling block; a trap

that you get stuck in or something that trips you up. They were trapped in this memory that they had of Jesus, so that seeing him *now* tripped them up.

There's actually a theological term for what's going on here. Theologians refer to it as "the scandal of familiarity." Something or someone is so familiar to us that it's actually not familiar at all. We know it *so well* that we don't really know it at all. An example of this: what was the fruit that Adam and Eve ate in the garden? An apple right? But where does it *say* that? Scripture doesn't actually tell us what kind of fruit it was. It was just the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We're so familiar with the story, so trapped in our memory of it, that we don't see it for what it *is*.

And just like those people in his hometown, we can do the same thing with Jesus. Those of us who have been Christians for a while, Jesus can be so familiar to us that we don't actually see him for who he *is*. We get trapped in what we *think* we know about Jesus, and it trips us up. And Mark says that Jesus could do no deed of power there among them. They didn't *take away* his power. They just refused to see him for who he is, and in doing so, it's like they refused to be transformed by him. They closed themselves off to his power.

When *we* fail to see Jesus for who he truly is, we don't rob *him* of *his* power. Jesus is who he is, regardless of what we think about him. But it's like we rob *ourselves* of the ability to be transformed by him. So what we have to do is look at Jesus with new eyes and see him as he truly is.

Our Transformation Team has been working for about nine months now, trying to discern how God is calling us to be the church today. They started off in those first few months reading

books together about how to *think differently*; how to step back and see ourselves with new eyes. Earlier this year, they visited three other churches to see how other churches are helping people experience God. When they finished those visits, they said, “You know what, we’ve looked at these other churches through the eyes of a first-time visitor, and it really helped us. We need to look at St. John’s through the eyes of a first-time visitor, because we’re so familiar with the church that maybe we’re not seeing things that we really need to see.”

So they picked a Sunday and came to worship intentionally trying to forget everything they know about our church. “What if it was our first time ever coming here? Would we know where to park? Would we know where to enter the building and where to go? Would we know where the restrooms are? Would we know when to stand up and sit down?”

(A quick aside here. If you have been here over the past few weeks, you know that we have changed up the order of worship. Not a lot, just a little bit. We’ve combined the prayer of confession with the prayer of invocation, and there have been times that we changed where you stand up and sit down. We have intentionally done that as a way of trying to help you get out of your familiarity with what we always do. There was a time a few weeks ago where we did not ask you to stand while we sang the Gloria Patri. It didn’t have a little asterisk by it in the bulletin, and we didn’t tell you to stand. But when the music started, you instinctively stood up to sing. When we said the Apostles’ Creed this morning, how many of us said the version we *always* say, instead of the version that is actually printed in the bulletin? We can become so familiar with something that we don’t see it as it actually *is*.)

The Transformation Team was intentional about trying to see the church with new eyes, as it actually *is*, and it turned out to be incredibly powerful. We can get so trapped in our memory of

how the church *was*, that we can't see what God is calling the church to be *now*. When *we* are intentional about looking at Jesus or the church or our community or other people or any other aspects of our lives with new eyes, seeing them *as they are*, it has the power to transform us and our relationship with those people and things. You might think that you know someone based on who they were or what they did in the past. But if you try to see them as they are now, it might transform your relationship with them.

Now, that is very hard to *do*. It is *hard* to try to set aside everything we *think* we know about Jesus or our church or other people and see them again for the first time. How do you just *forget* everything you know about something or someone?

After Jesus leaves his hometown, Mark says that he sends his disciples out two by two, to go out and teach and heal people the way he has been doing. It says that he told them to take nothing with them except a staff. "Don't take any food, no bag, no money; don't take any extra clothes with you. Don't worry about where you're going to stay." It's kind of a strange story to pair with the first six verses. It doesn't seem like they fit together; like they could be two separate sermons. Until we realize that Jesus is calling them out of what is familiar and comfortable to them, sending them out into something *new*, and telling them to *trust* that God will provide for them in the midst of that.

So maybe in order to see Jesus and our community and our church and other people as they truly are, we need to leave some things behind, leave what is familiar and comfortable to us, trusting that God will make a way and provide for our needs. You might say, "I'm going to forget everything that I have known or experienced about this person to try to see them as they are

now? What if I get hurt?" *Trust* that God is at work in this person – look for *that* – and trust that God will take care of you as you do.

A life of faith is not about staying where we feel safe and comfortable and familiar. It is about following Jesus into the unknown, trusting that he is *good* and he is *guiding* us and he will give us everything that we need to do what he is calling us to do. Sure, we can choose to stay where we are in what feels safe and familiar and comfortable. But we risk missing out on the deeds of power that Jesus is doing among us now. A life of faith is about looking at *everything* and *everyone* with new eyes, through the lens of the good news of Jesus Christ. And when we are intentional about doing that, we will experience his presence and power and love in new ways...and we will be transformed. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.