

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Mark 6:7-13

Dear Friends,

In the Gospel of Mark, the portrayal of the disciples is fascinating and challenging. In the beginning, they are individuals who respond quite generously. They leave all and follow Jesus. Today's selection from chapter six is the highlight of their positive response and successful ministry.

For the rest of the Gospel of Mark, we are given a rather confusing and bewildering picture of these men. Mark presents them as persons who just do not get it. Jesus is at pains to invite them into the beauty and wonder of the Mystery.

Right after the first miracle of the loaves and fishes followed by Jesus walking on the water, Mark says ***"They had not understood the incident of the loaves. On the contrary, their hearts were hardened."*** (Mk 6:52)

Then at the center of the Gospel, (Mk 8:27-35), Jesus asks who the people say he is. Peter responds correctly but then denies the need for Jesus to be rejected and suffer. From here on we are given a picture of the disciples as truly hard headed and ignorant men.

Three times Jesus tells them he is going to Jerusalem to be rejected, suffer and die and to rise from the dead on the third day. After each of these proclamations we have an incident that displays the disciples' total failure to grasp this central message of Jesus as the Suffering Messiah.

Finally, at the time of the Crucifixion, they all flee in fear and panic. Peter's denials highlight this total rejection of Jesus. But then Mark shows the true humanity of these flawed and broken men. ***"Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had said to him: 'Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' He broke down and wept."*** (Mk 14:72)

Then after the Resurrection we have these amazing words from the angel to the women, ***"Go tell the disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him as he told you'"*** (Mk 16:7)

So the disciples were going to have a second chance. This whole journey with Jesus began in Galilee and now Jesus was going to give them a second chance to see if they get it this time.

We need to see ourselves in these truly human followers of Jesus. We come with good will and generosity but so often, so very often we just do not get it. We live so far away from the ideal Gospel message. How wonderful it would be if we got to do life over again. Even if we are just eighteen, we already know some of our mistakes. If we are over forty, the list has grown into a book. If we are over sixty, we are now on our way to filling a library.

We all need to hear these wonderful words, ***"He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him as he told you."*** (Mk 16:7)

We are, in fact, given a second chance and many more besides. The gracious God revealed in Jesus accepts us in our brokenness and is always calling us out of our darkness and self-deceit into new light and life in Jesus Christ. Jesus did not give up on the disciples and he will not give up on us. Like the disciples, we need to know our brokenness but even more we need to know and embrace the compassion and love of the God that never lets the door be closed to a second or thousandth opportunity to do it over and get it right. We need to keep our eyes and our hearts fixed on Jesus.