

-My grandfather told this story once of why he joined the army. He remembers his parents being incredibly frightened on Sunday morning upon hearing on the radio that Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japan. My grandpa's dad was a Lutheran pastor, so he my grandpa went to church later that morning and all he remembers doing during that whole service was praying for his family and his country. Following church, he went outside and walked around somewhere. In his walking, he went right past a poster of Uncle Sam pointing at him and saying: "I want YOU for the United States Army". He described the emotion that ran through him as: "well, I guess this whole thing depends on me a little bit." It was at that moment that I my 14 year-old Grandpa said, "OK". He had to wait for 3 years until he turned 17 to finally be able to sign-up and later fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Throughout my childhood I had always heard my grandfather talking about serving in the military and the stories of struggle and courage. But it was rare that I ever heard him talk about his rationale on WHY he came to serve. "Well, I guess this whole thing depends on me a little bit."

-This story that we have of Jesus being rejected in the Gospel of Mark is probably more famous from the Gospel of Luke's rendition. Luke has Jesus rolling out the scroll in the synagogue and reading from the Book of Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has brought good news to the poor." The people in Jesus' hometown get so angry, they try to throw him off a cliff.

-Our Mark version doesn't have the cliff, but it does have some important parts that I think open Jesus' ministry to us in profound ways.

-The first is this story continues a pattern that Jesus does again and again in this gospel when he hits resistance from others: he withdraws (the Greek makes this very clear in verse 6: he WITHDREW to the other villages teaching), he regroups ("then he called the 12"), and sends out (story of commissioning disciples). This cycle happens over and over again in Mark and leads up to the greatest resistance of all, of course, the cross.

-Why does Jesus need to do this pattern or practice? Perhaps it is because of the type of rejection he faces.

-If you notice, the question that the people in verse 3 ask here in Mark is very different from the one they ask in Luke: "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." Notice here in Mark who is not talked about: Joseph. While he takes a place in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Joseph isn't mentioned AT ALL in the Gospel of Mark. Why does Mark fail to mention Joseph? We have no idea. Maybe Joseph was already dead by this time. Maybe Joseph gave his wife and children incredible amounts of freedom while he worked at home. Who knows. Whatever it is, Joseph is not mentioned in Mark, but Mary (the mother of Jesus) is named multiple times. Here is the crazy part: you would never see this lineage of Jesus named or written out in any form of documentation or cultural writings of Jesus' time. Jesus would

never be addressed as “Son of Mary”, that was ridiculous in this very patriarchal ancient near east culture. This is why Luke (which was written later), most likely corrects the gospel of Mark and has the people ask: “Isn’t this JOSEPH’S son?” So why do the people in Mark’s gospel address Jesus in this highly unusual way? It is most likely, most biblical scholars think, an insult. What they are trying to say is: “Isn’t this Mary’s bastard son?” Isn’t this the son whose dad is unknown to us and who, by the way, should be doing his family thing? Isn’t this the bastard son who, because his dad is out of the picture, should be the one caring for his mom, and his younger brothers and sisters? Oh look.....he’s not.

-Can you imagine trying to preach the love and coming of God’s Reign with this garbage being said about you? I certainly can’t. Thus, Jesus, not only is rejected by the social structures of the day but chooses to reject this structure entirely. If that’s how you are going to define me and God’s family than I don’t want any part in that.

-This puts Jesus (and his disciples) in a very challenging place. The family and home village was the safety net, the homebase, the foundation. In rejecting this structure, Jesus was putting himself at risk. Hospitality wasn’t just a “nicety”, it was the difference between life and death for Jesus and his disciples for they had no family to go back to. In rejecting the family structure of the day, the structure rejected him.

-You know, we don’t say very often “God needs us” do we? It’s usually the other way around (“come Lord Jesus, fill me” or “by calling on the power of Jesus in his name I do this”). We like to think of God, the great power (or whatever) in the sky, doing it’s thing and us little peons just responding to that. But in this case, God’s work doesn’t happen if we don’t welcome Jesus in.

-I took a class in seminary on various church styles (or what church nerds call “piety”) and we visited an African American congregation that was filled with incredible life, but very different from the piety that I grew up with. Following the service, I talked with a lady who I didn’t even know but gave me a hug and said: “Come once, you are a guest, come twice, you are family. I hope you can be a part of my family.”

-Is this story from Mark calling all followers of Christ to be wanderers? I don’t think so. But maybe it’s calling us to answer the door.

-Jesus was without honor, homeland, tribe, or family. Thus, he couldn’t do the work on his own, the 12 disciples had a huge role to play. They were, in many ways, his new family. “Well, I guess this whole thing depends on me a little bit.” What’s our role to play at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church? In what ways does “God need us” in order to preach and model the gospel of Jesus Christ?

-Your Church Council is in the beginning stages of a conversation about our building and how it can be improved to be a ministry to our greater community. One of the things being discussed and which we want feedback on is putting a moving wheelchair lift down the stairs to our basement. Not only would this be used by Boys and Girls Club

who plans to return in the fall, but also by us as a congregation family and community. What would it mean for us to upgrade our basement instead of being 1,850 square feet of church storage space to being a welcoming multi-use, multi-purpose space for gathering, study, play, and work? What would that look like for us? Maybe, introducing accessibility as well as re-imaging our church facility and its role in this community is our “answering the door.” “Well, I guess this whole thing depends on *us* a little bit.”  
-May God grant us wisdom and courage to reject unjust ways of “family” and help God bring about a new family of love and wholeness. Amen.