

Our Gospel story today begins in a shocking way, with just about the exact opposite of what we would expect in a Christian, hospitable welcome. When Jesus returned to his hometown after some time working away, it began in a way that's not too far off from how we imagine returning home too. When we go back to that place where we were raised when we're well into adulthood, where the people who knew you "way back when" tell stories about you and your siblings and kind of jostle you with jokes and information back and forth, like "hey, wasn't he learning carpentry with his dad? Whatever happened to that idea? What's he doing now?". But Jesus' reception isn't in that good humor or kind reminiscence, like we would hope for his return back to his hometown. Instead people were offended - didn't take the ministry and teaching and healing he did seriously, and were not able to see Jesus for who he was now, his whole being, human and divine. Their preconceived ideas of who Jesus had been prevented them from seeing what he was really doing. The Greek word used here as "offended" is *eskandalizonto*, the root of which means "scandal" or "stumbling block" as well as offended. The people in Jesus' hometown were scandalized that he proclaimed himself the Messiah and went about his holy work of healing and ministry.

How often have we too expected Jesus to be a certain way, like we always knew him, but were not able to see him for who he really was in the moment? How often have our own preconceived ideas of who Jesus is and what he's supposed to do clouded our interactions with Him?

It's not uncommon, friends, to expect Jesus to show up in a particular way that you've held dear for a long time. And sometimes He does show up and work in our world in the ways that we anticipate. But more often than not, our knowledge of the world, and of God's work in it, is challenged and grows when we truly encounter Jesus. People love deeper and are more generous than we expect. We come to terms with our own shortcomings or prejudices, rooted deeper in our thoughts and actions than we realize. We see the world in a new light, the light of Christ, rather than the rose-colored light we've become conditioned to and comfortable with. Jesus gives us a new way, and that new way can certainly feel risky and uncomfortable.

The second story told in our Gospel today feels like the epitome of this riskiness, especially in today's culture and society, for a variety of reasons. Not only have Jesus' disciples who are with him now dropped everything they previously knew to follow the one who called them and loves them, an enormous risk to give up your whole life and livelihood and means of survival, but now Jesus gives them new directions for how to do ministry.

Jesus commands his disciples to take basically nothing with them on their journey to heal and minister to people, only the clothes on their backs, shoes on their feet, and a walking staff for support. No extra clothes or food or shoes or anything like that - part of the work they were doing was to rely on the hospitality of the people they were ministering to. They were required to lean on the kindness and generosity of others simply to survive from day to day.

Relying on the hospitality and generosity of other people just to survive as you bring the good news of life and love in Christ Jesus to people? Relying on others to take care of your needs when you are commissioned with a calling to heal and minister and cast out demons?!

That is basically unheard of in today's world, and it's super fair to be nervous and skeptical about the whole thing.

I wonder if this call to rely on others' hospitality also feels risky to us in our modern understanding because we are used to things being done a certain way and believing everything on our journey should and must be held and dealt with on our own. Of course, there are certain things we must do for ourselves, like the motivation and calling the disciples followed to become disciples of Jesus in the first place. But this story demonstrates for us that our survival depends on the community around us. Our thriving can only come from the love and support of our neighbors as well as the actions we take for ourselves.

If our community isn't healthy, it's hard for us to really be healthy too. And this feeling of things needing to be done a certain way, our way, is yet

another moment in which we prevent ourselves from being open to what is truly in the here and now. Just as Jesus' hometown community expected him to be a certain way, and were scandalized and offended by the Messiah he became, we are sometimes blinded by our expectations of how things should be or have been. And these expectations don't always allow the love and grace of others to shine forth, and allow us to accept being served. The disciples had no choice but to accept hospitality, to lean on the generosity of others, the community, even when risking rejection and survival needs. And yet they made it. They ministered as Jesus called them to. They did the holy work of casting out unclean spirits and demons and healed and anointed the sick in the name of Jesus Christ. And that's ultimately what we need to remember - that Jesus is at the root of all we do. That we are all together the body of Christ that's needed in order to make the healing power of Jesus' love our community's reality, and it is up to us to both serve and be served as the given moment requires.

We can take comfort amidst this risk, that regardless of how Jesus shows up and what His work is or looks like, or how we encounter Him, Jesus is always, forever, steadfastly and surely, rooted in love. Love given by God and rooted in service of the neighbor. In relationships that are nurtured and sustained by love. And so we too can lean on the deep and never ending love of Jesus to guide us into interactions with him throughout our journeys.

The wisdom here is to lean not only on ourselves and our own understanding, but also on the generosity and love of neighbors. Maybe this is why the command to love our neighbors as ourselves comes only second to loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength - the command gives us the deepest reality of what it is to be the body of Christ, we need each other for survival. And we can't let our preconceived ideas of what that means or looks like get in the way of truly letting people in and allowing ourselves to be let in by others. We must simply show up as we are, humbly, with the things we carry, and believe that this is the way of Christ. We show up for one another and allow ourselves to be shown to others along the way. Our work as followers of Christ is to continue this

ministry of healing and teaching and living out the good news of Jesus, especially when we must rely on others to do so.

I pray that by embracing the fullness of Christian hospitality, being served and of service, that we will be surprised, perhaps even scandalized by the good news of Christ, and we will come to know Him and His continued work in the world even more clearly. Thanks be to God, Amen.