

“The Fate of Prophets”  
a sermon by Kyndall Rae Rothaus  
concerning Mark 6:1-13  
for Lake Shore Baptist Church, Waco  
on July 8, 2018

I’m not sure what I was dreaming about on Friday night, but when I woke up Saturday morning I thought to myself, I should open a donut shop. I like creating things and starting things; I’m sort of wired that way, so I think in my half-awake state I may have confused my entrepreneurial spirit with my simple desire to eat a donut.

And as I was lying there in bed, I remembered that what I’ve really always wanted to do is open a bookstore, so maybe it could be a bookstore that served donuts. Then the planning started to get cumbersome because it occurred to me if I was going to serve food, I should probably promote healthy eating, so maybe I could serve donuts *and green smoothies*? I was thinking about what healthy foods might go with donuts when I remembered that I don’t actually love cooking and I’ve never made a donut in my life. Also, I hate waking up early, and it seems donut-makers start early. By the time I was fully awake yesterday morning I had decided others might be more qualified at the donut thing than I am, and I might as well keep preaching at Lake Shore. (I even got up and made a green smoothie. However, I did eat a donut this morning, and I’m not going to tell you if that was the second time I ate donuts this week, so don’t even ask.)

Anyway, there is a point to this ridiculous monologue, which is I believe sometimes we dream and/or daydream about things when our subconscious is trying to send us a message, and I think it’s not too far-fetched to think my donut dream was trying to tell me that maybe I’m a wee bit tired. Sometimes the pastor’s life is hard and I just want to stop and make donuts instead. More realistically, I just want to stop and eat donuts that someone else makes for me.

Someone asked me this week if I ever end up rewriting my sermon partway through the week given what’s happening in the world at any given time. I said that sometimes I do reshape my sermon given current events, but not always. For one thing, given the rapid rate of unfolding problems in our world today, I could be writing a reactionary sermon every single week. But also, sometimes I trust the biblical text to be relevant without my drawing the connections for you. On top of that, I am also aware that whatever may be going on out there, a lot is also happening right here. Someone in the pew just got a difficult diagnosis. Someone miscarried. Someone else is contemplating divorce. There is no tried and true formula for knowing when to comfort and when to stir the waters. They cannot teach this in seminary. And in case you didn’t know, everyone has a different opinion. Some people want you to keep politics out of the pulpit. Some people say the Gospel is political. I constantly see people posting on social media after major events, “If your pastor doesn’t address this on Sunday, you should find a new church.”

Overall, I try to ignore the noise and listen to the Spirit, but I do that knowing full well that my listening skills cannot always be trusted. There’s a lot of personal bias and personal experience that influences what I hear and what I want to hear when I open the biblical story and begin to sermonize. I also know from experience that sometimes when the Spirit is most clear, people are

going to get the most upset. I know that no matter how well I listen and retell what I hear, there are plenty of people in this world who will never listen to me.

I do not think the struggle about knowing what to say and when to say it is unique to me. You don't need a pulpit to feel the angst of these times. In your own ways and in your own vocations you too are trying to be truth-tellers in a world overrun by dishonesty. It's challenging to know when to speak up and when to be silent and how to say what needs to be said. Families that once danced around political divisions now find those divisions front and center and unavoidable. Coworkers and friends voice sentiments in the name of Christianity that do not reflect your Christ, and you wonder if now is the time to say so. Congregations that once stayed out of the public sphere find themselves compelled to engage. Often the choice to engage comes with a cost.

Jesus says a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown. I think of the prophetic witness of this congregation and how it has cost us our local denominational affiliations. I know that in many ways we are a very privileged congregation, but in other ways, we are a company of misfits who know a thing or two about rejection and how it feels to be cast aside for telling the truth about God's love.

The story in our Gospel text today isn't the most uplifting of the Jesus stories, but the spirit of antagonism certainly hits close to home. Jesus is preaching in the synagogue in his place of origin and even though he just raised a girl from the dead, the people are skeptical. *Who does he think he is? Didn't we watch him grow up? Isn't he just a carpenter? I once paid his dad to build me a table!*

*You go to Lake Shore? Is that a real church? I heard they don't even have a projection screen in the sanctuary. And they only believe in love. I'd be careful if I were you.*

Repeatedly throughout Scripture, when you are called to be a prophet, rejection comes with the territory. Skepticism from others about you and your message comes with the territory. Angst comes with the territory. Fear and trembling comes with the territory. *Who am I to speak for God?* As my preaching professor, Hulitt Gloer, used to say, if you're not scared, you're doing something wrong. This is holy and important work, being Christ's ambassadors in the world, and if you are at all a student of history, you know that people get it wrong, deadly wrong, over and over again. And the closer you get to doing it right, generally speaking, the more antagonism you face. This isn't a gig that comes with guaranteed applause or reliable positive reinforcement. You cannot rely on the approval of your peers or your family. You have to listen deeper than all the noise, listen close for the true call of God that often comes only as a whisper.

The Gospel text says that because of the disbelief of the people, Jesus "could do no deed of power there," which sounds like discouraging news indeed. Only, there is a nugget of good news too. Jesus "could do no deed of power there . . . *except* that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them." Even when Jesus is thwarted, he still helps a few people in a big way, which I think is worth noting. Even when it feels like you're being obstructed from what you are really capable of accomplishing, it makes a difference to somebody. Friends, I can tell you that while we may have gotten kicked out of some organizations, we have absolutely made a huge

difference to some LGBTQ people in our community, and *that* is Gospel ministry right there. When others stand in the way of your work, do not lose heart. When it feels like you have lost and are losing, do not heart. When you choose to live as Christ in this world, yes, you will get beaten down, much like Christ, and yes, your good work will matter to someone.

It seems to me that following God's call requires detaching from the outcome. We often don't know who our work will affect and how, but we do the work anyway. Jesus tells the disciples that if a place does not welcome them, or refuses to hear them, then they can shake the dust from their feet when they leave as a testimony against them, which may sound a little harsh, but I think Jesus is saying don't sweat it if people don't listen. This sounds similar to when God called the prophet Ezekiel, which we read about earlier our worship today. God said, "Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel . . . whether they hear or refuse to hear, they shall know that there has been a prophet among them." Your job is to not to ensure that people change. Your job is to be faithful to the work whether people change or not.

Of course, it's not like you can just stop caring about the outcome. If you didn't care, you couldn't do passionate work. To detach from the outcome doesn't mean you stop wanting to be effective. It just means that your fidelity to the work can survive long bouts of seeming ineffectiveness and setback. It means that you celebrate the small stuff knowing the small things might be what sustain you.

That being said, it's not like everything we do is small potatoes. After he is rejected by his hometown, Jesus then sends his disciples out two by two, and interestingly, while the Gospel of Mark often portrays the disciples as bumbling and ineffective, in this particular story, they are dynamite. It says they cast out demons and anointed the sick and healed them. Sometimes just when things look most dire, miracles are right around the corner.

It's almost like Jesus' rejection served as this catalyst to get the disciples moving. I find this to be a particularly apt description of our own times. The compassionate message of Jesus is being rejected, and yet Christ's people are being galvanized to go forth and do justice. Sometimes when we see the good rejected, we know it is time to get up and join the work. Jesus' hometown may not have recognized him for who he was, but the disciples weren't going to leave Jesus to do the work alone.

And perhaps here is where our hope lies. Not in our effectiveness but in the fact that Christ has sent us, Christ goes with us, Christ has been here before, and we are not alone. Or as God said to the prophet Ezekiel, "O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me." The very power of God is present to animate our speech and set us on our feet, no matter the trials that befall us.

Before I conclude this sermon, I must add the following disclaimer, which is that this sermon was not intended to belittle those who make donuts, as if the work of the prophet were somehow more important. Thank God for the donut-makers whose sugary confections make the world go 'round. Whatever the work to which God calls you, may you do so with gusto, determination, and grace. Amen.