



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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Poland, Ohio 44514
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July 5, 2015

6th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:1-13

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

“The Boy Next Door”

I cannot remember who it was who recently told me this story and I have not been able to verify it's authenticity but the story goes like this: Someone read an obituary recently that stated that the deceased had been a long time member of a particular church and “then she met Jesus” and was now a member of another church. I pondered that statement trying to figure out if this person had to leave the church to meet Jesus, as if Jesus were not present in the church. We think about the church as being the place where Jesus is always present and available to “meet us.” But sometimes Jesus seems to blend in with the furniture and we don't recognize Him because He has become so familiar to us.

We sing about Jesus every Sunday, we read about Jesus, we pray to Jesus, we preach Jesus and in communion we partake of Jesus. How could anyone fail to encounter Jesus here? Well, we often say that familiarity breeds contempt.” Could it be that Jesus has become so common place in the church that we have failed to recognize his power, authority, and love?

This is what happened in our story today when Jesus went home. As He spoke the people looked at one another and asked, “Isn't this the boy next door?” You know the boy next door; the one you watched grow up on your street. You would yell at him as he ran across your yard in pursuit of a baseball. You would see him cutting up with his classmates as they walked to school. He took your daughter to the Senior Prom. This kid is not genius you might be thinking when he returns home as a Senator or a member of the President's Cabinet or a local judge. How could he be in a position of authority? Then contempt sets in. Who is Johnny to be making the rules here? Just where does he think he gets his power?

And Jesus could do no deeds of power there – no miracles, just a few healings.

Jesus was present with the people in his hometown. He didn't change into someone else. Why couldn't they recognize him? Why can't we recognize him when he is present here with us? Scripture says that Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. They simply did not believe that he could be anyone other than the boy they had always known or that he could do anything meaningful.

I think that when each of us gets up on Sunday morning and gets dressed up for church and makes their way here, there is a deep unspoken desire in our hearts to meet Jesus. That is why we come. Maybe we want to meet Jesus in our fellow members or as we pray or in the music or sermon. We come here with the words on our hearts, "Give me Jesus". But although we want to meet Jesus here we don't always really expect that we will. We set our expectations way too low. That is what happened when Jesus went home. The people in his hometown didn't expect that they would meet the messiah in their own hometown boy. This was Mary's kid and there had always been those unspoken rumors about Mary. And just look at him – he doesn't look like he has had a bath in weeks and his clothes are just rags. He is an embarrassment to our town. They had no expectations that the boy next door was anyone special.

We go to concerts expecting to be blown away by the music. We go to movies expecting to be deeply moved by the actors. We go out to dinner expecting to be delighted and satisfied by the quality of the food. When we come to church we should expect to meet Jesus here. Not that we won't meet him in other places, like a walk in Poland Woods, and at other times, like sitting in traffic, but let's raise our expectations of meeting him in church a little bit higher.

The Jesus we have come to know is not just the Jesus on the Good Shepherd window. He is not just the Jesus that lives in story books that we have come to know so well since we first learned about him in Sunday School. Jesus is a living presence among us who works his miracles still with power and authority. We don't have to leave this place to meet the Jesus who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Just like the people Jesus encountered in his earthly ministry, all we need do is believe in his power.

About thirty years ago when I lived in Washington, DC, I had two friends that I had met through church, Jack and Nancy. They had both been faithful church members all their life. They invited me over one evening for Jack's 40th birthday party. I brought a book as a gift, a book that I had just finished reading which had touched my spirit. The book was "*Nine O'Clock in the Morning*", about a church in Connecticut that came alive when they began to believe in Jesus and his

miracles. For the year before this Jack and Nancy had gone to church less and less because they were so involved in something many of you might remember – Amway. They were often going to Amway meetings on Sundays trying to recruit new members for the pyramid.

Well, that evening we got into a discussion about Jesus and Jack threw the book across the room and said, “If Jesus is present, he can pick this book up and give it to me.” Being the hands of Jesus in that moment, I picked up the book and laid it on the table before getting my coat and leaving. I didn't hear from them for several months and then one afternoon I received a call from Nancy. “You know that book you gave Jack for his birthday? He read it and so did I, and we were wondering if you could come over tonight and pray with us.” I did. They started attending church again but said that there was something different about it now Jesus seemed to be there. The next year Jack decided to quit his job and attend seminary. Up until his death a few years ago he pastored a little church in Charlestown, WV. Jesus can work wonders in our lives when we trust in his power.

We don't have to leave Poland Presbyterian Church to meet Jesus. He is right here with us – in the hands that make the chili and coleslaw to take to the Salvation Army and the ones that take Meals from the Heart to those among us who are ill. Jesus is with us in the deacons who visit the homebound and he is there at our session meetings. Jesus is present whenever we speak to him in prayer or praise him in song. Jesus is present when we open up his word and read about his great deeds of wonder. Jesus is present when we open our hearts in love for one another and when we welcome in the stranger who is visiting. He is not just a name on a page; he is a living person who walks with us every day.

Jesus is not powerless here unless we allow him to be. He has not lost his authority here, unless we have taken it from him. Jesus is the reason we are here in the first place. Because He is our messiah we can proclaim, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!”