

CANON DAVIS MEMORIAL CHURCH

Anglican Church of Canada

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, July 7, 2024

Worship Service: Sunday 9:00 a.m.

Jesus in the Synagogue

Sermon

Prophet Rejected in Hometown

Mark 6: 1-13

May only Truth be spoken and may only Truth be heard. Amen

Willie Mays born May 6th, 1931 in Westfield, Alabama was a baseball

legend. His parents never married and early on his mother left him and his

father who went on to raise Willie by himself. As a young man, he learned

the craft of baseball from his father and grandfather who were legends of

their own in the Negro League. Willie Mays had some of the most

impressive stats in Major League Baseball. In his 23 year professional

career, the “Say Hey Kid” played for the New York then San Francisco

Giants having 3283 hits,660 home runs and a was an MLB All Star 24

times! He was outstanding in his profession but he was ostracized and

demeaned for not taking a stand on race relations and segregation as a black

athlete. He chose instead, to help the underprivileged children of Harlem and

could be found many evenings playing stickball with the black children in the neighbourhood. He tried to buy a mansion in San Francisco following his trade but after people refused to sell to a black man in a predominantly upscale, white neighbourhood, Mays' simply purchased a home back in New York where he was accepted and honored. People like Jackie Robinson and Hank Aaron spoke out publicly about Willie's refusal to become politically involved with the issue of segregation. Mays' said "I can do best for my people by doing what I do best". His attitude was to be a mentor to other blacks by being the best version of himself as a professional ball player. He was a legend to those like him and was accepted by the fans for the amazing all round player he was.

In Mark's Gospel today, Jesus has made his way from Capernaum through the region of Galilee and has come into his hometown of Nazareth a small village on a rocky hillside population around 500. Here Jesus spent his formative years learning the craft of carpentry living with his mother and father, brothers and sisters. He would have attended the local synagogue and

learned the Torah at Hebrew school and would have known or been related to many of the townsfolk.

At the time of his return with the 12 disciples, his mother, who would have long been a widow and his immediate family did not have much knowledge of his mission so when on the Sabbath, Jesus is in the local synagogue reading scripture and teaching, the locals get restless and begin to take offense. As some of us have experienced in our own lives, going back to either your hometown, your old high school even seeing old acquaintances can be difficult and unnerving. Sometimes we have changed so much either physically or mentally or emotionally, that we are not recognized or accepted for who we have become. For Jesus in this piece of scripture this morning, the local Nazarenes are skeptical of Jesus and his message. They remember this kid from their past who was born under “unconventional” circumstances to a very young girl and her much older fiancé. He was a mere carpenter back in the day, not a very noble profession. What authority does he think he has to speak to us like he is in the synagogue? Where has he gotten his ability to teach the Torah to us, this illegitimate, uneducated

drifter? It says that the people of Nazareth “took offense” to him so much so, Jesus could not and would not perform miracles to those who did not recognize or accept his divinity.

People had a predetermined version of Jesus, son of Mary, in their heads and he was not welcomed in his hometown. His own brothers and sisters were among the skeptics! Jesus says to his disciples as he readied them to go out two by two, “there is no honor for prophets in their hometown”. In the Old Testament, prophets were run out of villages and temples, some even put to death because the truth is hard to hear and harder to live by. Jesus could not perform acts of healing to the unfaithful and non-believers – it doesn’t work that way – then or now. To have faith is an act of letting go and releasing any ideals of control. The people of Nazareth did not have the faith Jesus thought they would have and he warns his disciples that the task before them will be met with the same resistance and challenges too but that he will give them authority over demons and the ability to heal! He further instructs them to take nothing but the tunic on their backs and the sandals on their feet faithful God will provide the rest. A very interesting part of this

Gospel is Jesus' instruction to "shake off the dust of your feet as a testimony against them", meaning like the pious Jews that shook off their feet after walking through a Gentile area as a sign of their wish to remain separate, the disciples are to remain separate from those who reject Jesus and his message. See whoever hears the message of Jesus is responsible with that message – you must act on this message.

The message was then and is now to repent and turn to God. The disciples were to anoint with oil those who believed and were healed. In our baptism we too were anointed and healed from our sinfulness and we continue to reaffirm our faith while saying the Creed and coming to the table for Holy Eucharist. By staying true to our Christian teachings and Christ we stay close to God and are beacons of hope for those who don't have faith or believe in Christ crucified.

Willie Mays' story is one of staying true to his roots, being a mentor and role model to young black children without having to become political or changing what his truth was. He walked away from those situations that

didn't make him a better ball player or human being. Mays' honored his past and at the same time did what he did best; played ball.