

Rejected

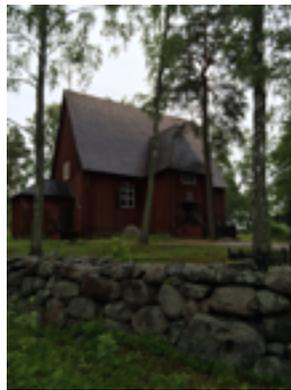
Mark 6:1-13

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The 6th Sunday after Pentecost

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[SLIDE 32] As you all know, John and I have just returned from one of those “bucket-list” holiday experiences. We spent 12 days touring Scandinavia, followed by a week-long stay in England where I was participating in a conference devoted to exploring the Bible and early Christianity. One of the delights of our tour was visiting all sorts of historic sites — castles, churches, and museums — all of which have interesting stories attached to them. The building you see here is



called “Karuna Kirkko” or Karuna Church. It is one of the oldest buildings on Seurasaari — a living history museum located just outside the city of Helsinki, Finland. But this little church was originally located on the estate of Baron Arvid Horn in southwestern Finland. It was built in 1685 and called the Maria Elisabet Chapel. Maria Elisabet was Baron Arvid’s second wife. Rumor has it he may have already been in love with her while his first wife, Lady Ingeborg was still alive. But for certain after Lady Ingeborg passed away, Baron Arvid was determined to marry Maria Elisabet. Unable to get her father’s permission, he took off with her into the wilderness for several months. When they returned in the spring, the local church authorities not only refused to bless their union, but barred the couple from sitting in the family pew at the front of the church and refused to give them Holy Communion. This went on for some time.

When it became clear the church authorities were not going to budge on their stance, Baron Arvid had this little church built on his estate. Although it was a public church open to all, as its owner Baron Arvid retained the right of patronage which gave him the right to appoint its clergy. By building his own church and hiring his own pastor Baron Arvid ensured that he and his new wife could sit in the front pew as was proper for a noble family, and receive Holy Communion whenever they wished. Karuna Kirkko thus began as a nobleman’s response to the official

church's rejection of him and his marriage. Today Karuna Kirkko is a popular site for Finnish weddings.

I share this story of Karuna Kirkko today not just because it is a way of sharing a bit of our holiday with you, but because it shares a number of themes with our gospel lesson. **[STEP 1, STEP 2]** Both are stories about rejection by religious communities that are scandalized and offended by the behavior of the protagonists. In both cases, the protagonists' response to rejection is instructive.



Mark 6:1-12

We meet Jesus this morning in his hometown of Nazareth, teaching in the synagogue during the Sabbath assembly. The worshipping community is astounded and offended, outraged and scandalized by this. After all they know who Jesus is — the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon, and at least two unnamed sisters (Mark 6:3). Our English translations typically smooth over the rough edges of this story. Jesus is called a carpenter, a highly skilled middle class trade in our society

associated with the production of fine wood products like the altar and lectern that grace our sanctuary. The Greek would be more more accurately translated as construction worker, which in the world of Jesus described the unskilled, landless peasants hired or conscripted to work on Herod's building projects. In first century Galilee to call Jesus "the son of Mary" was to say that he was a fatherless person, conceived or born out of wedlock, raised perhaps in a single parent family — all circumstances that would have had negative impact on Jesus' social status. This was a world where birth and family of origin largely determined how much education one received, and what professions one might pursue. So for Jesus, a man of dubious origin and low social status to turn up in the synagogue teaching and preaching was outrageous, scandalous, and offensive. For the worshippers in the Nazareth synagogue, it is simply inconceivable that such a person could have anything positive, educational, or spiritually uplifting to offer. These people did not and perhaps could not have faith in him. So they did not come to listen to his teaching or bring their children for his blessing. They did not seek Jesus' help. Only a few people brought their sick for healing.

Jesus was rejected by the religious people of his hometown, the people he grew up among. They had him pigeonholed on the basis of his birth and origins. They had to put him in what they thought was his proper place. What does Jesus do? When rejected, Jesus lays his hands on the few sick people who come to him and heals them. When rejected, Jesus wonders at the people's unbelief, their lack of faith. When rejected, Jesus goes around to the surrounding villages, the ones outside but around his hometown, and teaches. When rejected, Jesus call his disciples, sends them out two by two with instructions on what to take with them, how to dress, where to stay, and how to respond when they are rejected. **[STEP 3, STEP 4]**



Jesus tells his disciples, “If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake of the dust that is on your feet as a testimony — not against them, but to them” (Mark 6:11). Jesus sends his disciples to proclaim the good news, to cast out demons, to heal the ill sick, and to accept hospitality offered. If there is no offer of hospitality, they demonstrate that they are not

there to take anything - not even the dust - if it is not freely offered.¹ Jesus tells his disciples that when they experience rejection — and they will, just as he experienced rejection — they are to shake the dust off their feet and carry on.

Let’s think about that for a moment. When faced with rejection what are our options? When the church rejected Baron Arvid and his bride, he could have mounted endless legal suits against the church. He might have threatened the church authorities, or sought revenge through violence. He might have just given up on the church and on religion altogether, and become the medieval equivalent of today’s “nones.” But he didn’t, instead he built his own church and hired his own pastor. When Jesus was rejected by his hometown congregation, he might have responded with anger or violence. He might have given up teaching and preaching altogether and gone back to doing construction work in Sepphoris. But he didn’t, instead he went to the surrounding villages and continued to preach and teach, to heal and serve, to build communities of followers committed to his vision of God’s reign.

Jesus chose not to be defined by the past but by the future. He started a movement that looked forward to the reign of God both in heaven and on earth. For the followers of Jesus, it is the reign of God which is already emerging, even if it is not yet completely established, which determines our actions here and now in the present. Hence, the things of the past — family, hometown, synagogue, “the way we’ve always done it,” our failures, the rejections we have experienced — do not determine how we act now or in the future. So Jesus urges his followers to shake the dust of rejection off their feet, to leave it behind, instead of letting it build up, weighing us down and tripping it up.

This morning I would like us to spend a few minutes in silent reflection, thinking about the metaphorical dust that has accumulated on our feet — those rejections, hurts and failures of the past that may be getting in the way of God’s activity in our lives. Is there some area — some regret we can’t get over, some grudge we can’t let go, some hurt that has come to define us, some addiction that imprisons us, some anger that has taken hold of us? As you come up for communion this morning, you will see a bowl of “dust” beside the baptismal font. I invite you to shake a bit of this “dust” into the baptismal font, turning it over to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who in the waters of baptism has claimed you together with all the dust that has and will

¹ See D. Mark Davis, “Mission Grounded in Rejection,” at <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2012/07/mission-grounded-in-rejection.html>.

ever attach itself to you. Shake off this dust from your feet, leave it behind and walk freely into the future God is preparing for you. Amen.