

## “Take and Shake”

A sermon by the Reverend Joe Genau  
for Edgewood Presbyterian Church

Mark 6:1-31

February 9, 2020 - Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Our Gospel lesson picks up immediately after the healing of the bleeding woman and the raising of the synagogue leader’s daughter that we heard about last week. Mark’s Jesus bounds from place to place, and the plot rolls along quickly, and so we’re about to cover a whole bunch of action in only thirty-one verses. So I want to present it to you in three parts.

Let’s call Part 1 “Thanksgiving in Your Twenties.” Listen for the Word of God in the Gospel according to Mark:

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Part 2 we can call “Instructions for the Road.” Mark continues:

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

We can call Part 3 “More Personal Than an Amazon Gift Card?” Mark continues:

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus’ name had become known. Some were saying, “John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.” But others said, “It is Elijah.” And others said, “It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.” But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he

protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom."

She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the baptizer on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When [John's] disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

We have Jesus going home, Jesus sending the apostles, and Herod beheading John the baptizer. Given that everyone here appears to have their head firmly attached to the rest of their bodies and I didn't see anyone enter wearing a tunic and carrying a staff, let's start with this visit home.

It might mean heading down a staircase, down the street, driving a few hours, or flying.

It might mean your parents, your extended family, or just the old crew.

It's heading home for Thanksgiving with all the knowledge in the world, now that you have almost a full semester of college under your belt.

It's coming back for a wedding that you wish you could skip, or a funeral you wish didn't need to happen at all.

It's going to the reunion and praying everyone's grown up a bit.

It's coming back to your people, and it's true that they know you. If you're lucky, they've been there for you when you were down and out. They could tell stories...

But, at some level, at least a few of them don't know you anymore. Maybe you've been actively avoiding letting them in and keeping them up to date. Maybe you've been screaming at the top of your lungs, trying to be understood. You're not sixteen anymore. You've accumulated experiences and relationships and secrets and uncovered new truths and developed new tastes.

To somebody out there you're not twelve or twenty-two or thirty-two or forty-two or seventy-two. To them, you are the kid they have frozen in time as a clueless child or a highly dramatic teen or a young adult who made a ton of mistakes. *Isn't that the carpenter, Mary's son? I hear he thinks he's a prophet now!*

The experience Jesus has in his hometown is perhaps the most relatable thing about him that we find in the Gospels. They just refuse to see that he is not the same person he was when he lived there. When he tries to tell them who he is — to show them who he is — they are offended. And his power is limited there.

There are some in my family who like to lock me in to the way I talked and the things I said when I was about seventeen. It's frustrating. I'm more mature now. I have seen more of the world. I'm embarrassed when I remember parts of my younger self. And there these folks sit, who are so sure they know me, ready to discount any growth or transformation that might have occurred in the past two-plus decades.

But I have never had to go home and tell anyone anything about my identity that was going to cause them to take offense. The closest was when I knew I was going to pursue a call to ministry and my mom was really worried. I was a political science major in college and she wondered aloud how I was going to put aside all the debates and opinions: "Joey, you love to argue! You're gonna give that up?" Clearly, my mom hadn't been part of a church for quite awhile. She relented when I pointed out that I'd have a captive audience for making my own case for fifteen minutes each Sunday.

I know that some of you have dealt with far more daunting conversations. You've had to go "back home" to talk about who you love. You have had to explain about something as fundamental as your identity or your body. You have prayed for courage and chosen to be truthful to yourself and your people and your God. You have sought to live with authenticity.

And sometimes those conversations go well.

And sometimes they don't, and you are told that you are not who you say you are, that you are causing trouble, that you need to change yourself or hide yourself or remove yourself.

Sometimes, you suddenly find your power limited back home.

This beheading story connects here. John spoke the truth to powerful people and he paid a price for it. His words were threatening to Herodias. Her husband was king, but he lacked the courage to risk embarrassment to save an innocent life. John spoke with authenticity. This wasn't welcomed in the halls of power. It rarely is, especially when the truth is inconvenient to the powerful.

So telling the truth can cause problems in your family and with the government! (Hooray!)

Thankfully, Jesus has a plan for that. We have this bit about sending the disciples. It's tucked in, between the more exciting events. But it's where the treasure is for the seekers of authentic life who encounter resistance. Jesus will lead you into choppy water, but he'll never leave you without hope.

Jesus was amazed at what he encountered in his hometown. So he went elsewhere, to teach among the villages.

*He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two*

You do not need to do this alone. Friends, partners, kindred spirits, sages, counselors, pastors —

authenticity requires the buddy system. Who can know your truth — the beautiful and the justifiably embarrassing — and still walk with you?

*He gave them authority over the unclean spirits.*

Share power. Learn that you can accomplish far more than you think you can. Remember that you are made in the image of God and that God has holy work for you to do.

*He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.*

Keep it simple. Shed whatever baggage you can. Be prepared to move quickly, like the Israelites had to when they were on their way out of Egypt and into freedom. Don't slow yourself down carrying what you don't need to carry. Trust that you will encounter hospitality.

*He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place..."*

When you encounter hospitality, trust it. Take "yes" for an answer. When you are welcomed and celebrated as you are, learn to let yourself be loved. When you are offered an authentic blessing, don't turn away from it in fear.

Stay with those who accept you and invest in those relationships.

*"If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."*

If you are rejected, take nothing from those people. Don't accept an offer with strings of inauthenticity attached. Don't take their fear. Don't take their bitterness. Don't take their judgment. You have no room in your tunic pockets for their garbage. Shake your feet and clap your sandals together — don't even take their dust with you.

Did you notice that back in his hometown, though Jesus "could do no deed of power there" Mark concedes "except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them"? His power was limited, but it was not eradicated. He was not completely powerless. Healing continued. And then he went on his way.

Authenticity seems to be such a simple concept, and yet it's one of the hardest things to find and to do and to trust. We have an economy and a political system built on selling us distortion and fear and a mirage of perfection and exceptionalism. Telling the actual truth is bad for business, whether you're hawking a product or running for office.

And if your business is dealing with spiritual depth and ultimate questions and soul-tending — that is, if you belong to a church or another community of faith — authenticity remains a liability. Our little project of Edgewood Presbyterian Church could become a lot more financially stable if y'all would just give in

and draw a line about who's more worthy than whom and pick a group to condemn and ask me to preach about how if you just pray hard enough, God will make your life easy and #blessed.

But you keep insisting on truth.

You keep reminding one another that life may be messy, but it's a lot more fun in community.

And that hospitality is a contact sport we take seriously here.

And not to spend energy in the places you're not welcomed.

And that you may not be able to pick your relatives,

but you can build for yourself a church family

that will believe you when you tell them who you are,

and will remind you who you are when you have forgotten,

and will stand up to the powerful on your behalf,

and will show up in your weakness with a feast.

You stubbornly arrive here and shake the dust from a world preoccupied with being preoccupied.

And you take a hand that needs something real to hold onto.

And you take music into your bones.

And you take bread and cup and trust wild and impossible promises.

And you take one another at their word when they say,

"I see you. You're you. And you are beloved."

Well, if that's how you want it, then:

Welcome home.