

A portion of today's Gospel in Eugene Peterson's *Message* reads:

*He left there and returned to his hometown. His disciples came along. On the Sabbath, he gave a lecture in the meeting place. He made a real hit, impressing everyone. "We had no idea he was this good!" they said. "How did he get so wise all of a sudden, get such ability?" But in the next breath they were cutting him down: "He's just a carpenter -- Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. . . Who does he think he is?"*

This translation/paraphrase works because the statement in the New Revised Standard Version that says the people were offended by Jesus just doesn't capture what was going on in their heads. It wasn't the teaching that offended, it was the fact that he was so good that Jesus showed everyone up! It was one thing to acknowledge sound teaching. It was quite another to acknowledge that it was coming from that woman's son, whose fatherly heritage was suspect at best.

"If I'm not able to teach like that - and I have a clear sense of who I am and my station in life - then no one should. Especially not that Boy Carpenter."

Envy springs from Jesus' obvious lack of paternal pedigree. "Son of Mary" not the carpenter's son. Envy emerges when the local kid makes good and it isn't you.

Whoa. That hits home. In spite of all our education, in spite of our knowing better intellectually, there resides in our deepest psyche a demon named Envy. Envy doesn't like it when someone gets what we think we deserve, especially when they obviously don't deserve it.

When Envy grabs ahold of us, we get sucked back into the honor/shame system that Jesus railed against regularly. In Jesus' time, people believed that there was only a certain amount of honor and status that went around. If someone of lower status attempted to take honor for themselves, it had to come from somewhere. Therefore, raising one's status required that someone else's was lowered.

What's interesting is that the people's stubbornness inhibited the amount of good Jesus could do in their midst. Jesus still had the power - he did heal a few people here and there. But, over all, the envy of the crowds made it impossible for Jesus to work in his hometown. And so, Jesus left to teach elsewhere.. "Buh-bye Nazareth! I'm going where I might make a difference."

There's something to be said about moving on when you no longer have the ability to use your superpowers. Why waste your energy on the unappreciative. It doesn't mean you stop loving them. It just means you've come to your senses. Jesus knew about co-dependence, obviously.

The hometown folks lost their focus. Instead of listening to Jesus, they turned inward and let their personal discomfort overshadow the love and wisdom being offered to them. They replied "not interested" to Jesus' invitation to a new way of life and love.

Isn't that what happens to all of us? We let our personal discomfort with new ways impede our relationship with the Lord! Believe me, it's happening right now in Austin, Texas, where thousands of Episcopalians are gathering in General Convention. Snark hit social media about 30 seconds after the praise band played the first chords of the gathering hymn.

"If I wanted to worship like that, I'd join the Vineyard."

“Why does the Prayer Book need revision? Didn’t we just do that?”

“Do we have to talk about racism? #metoo? Refugees? We’re using Spanish in the liturgies. Doesn’t that count?” Jesus says “No. And, unless you embrace my teachings, I can do no acts of power here.”

I love what Presiding Bishop Curry asked us all to do: Throw yourself into the arms of Jesus. He asked us all to seek love, seek freedom, and seek abundant life. Bishop Curry asks us to turn from the ways we know no longer work and trust Jesus to lead us toward justice and reconciliation. Something tells me that the well-heeled, senior, primarily caucasian, proper Anglicans squirmed more than just a little. Maybe some of you are as well.

I don’t believe, and I don’t think Bishop Curry believes, that the Episcopal Church’s mission is to preserve an institution. I believe Jesus is inviting us to take him seriously. I believe Jesus wants to do acts of power among us. But, will we allow him to do that?

Jesus moved on from Nazareth with his disciples. Looking back at the gospel reading from last week, you can see (in hindsight) that Jesus is giving the Twelve hard examples of what it will be like to be a disciple going forward. They will need to risk being called unclean, bossed around, and rejected. Their personal desires need to take a back seat to the realm of God. It's good training. I've experienced each of these things as a deacon and as a priest. Bishop Sutton remarked at the preaching conference I attended a few weeks ago that if you are looking for love or recognition, ordained ministry is not where you want to be.

It's also true for the baptized lay folks on the front lines of justice and reconciliation.

The longer I'm around the church, the more I believe that when people fear change, they really fear death. We fear the death of something: A cherished memory. A long-held belief. A grudge. A relationship. We fear the chaos that happens when we are faced with uncertainty. Former Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, when talking about the push back regarding her election, said that fear of change is all about grief.

When did we stop believing in resurrection? When did we forget the message that God, in raising Jesus from the dead, banished the sting of death for ever?

When did we forget that it is ALWAYS out of chaos that God brings new creation?

When did we forsake the gospel message in favor of our own preferences and desires?

In his sermon at the opening Eucharist of General Convention, Bishop Curry quoted a hymn he learned as a child. One of the lines of the song was “Keep your eye on the prize.” He asked us to stay focused on what is most important: the love of Jesus and its restorative power. To do so we must put away our fears. We must understand that those who most need Christ’s love may not look like us or talk like us. They may have been hurt by the church in some way and need a kinder, softer message from us to begin healing. We need to suspend our bias and prejudice toward messengers who stir up feelings of envy. We need to trust the Lord to save us.

Grief may come. It is understandable. But, keep your eye on the prize. Do not be afraid. Jesus’ arms are outstretched and waiting for you.