**Text: Mark 6:1 – 13**

If It Was Easy, Everyone Would Do It

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. When I was in high school, it was about this time of year that the countdown to football season would start. Now this wasn’t the count down to the first game, no this was the countdown to camp. Everyday when we came in to the weight room there was a clock that would tick down the days until camp started. Now our camp was different from a lot of the programs in our area because as far as I know, we were the only team that did 3 a-days, meaning that we had three practices each day for 9 days with 2 scrimmages and 2 off days. It was hard but it served a purpose. Usually after day one roughly 5-10 people would turn in their equipment and call it quits and throughout camp as a whole we’d lose about 15 people total. This, of course, was part of the process and part of the point of having such a demanding period. Camp was meant to weed out the people who weren’t committed enough to the team and the people who just couldn’t handle the pressure. Now it was a silly thing like football, but it did teach us important life lessons. It taught us the value of commitment, because I can’t think of anyone from those teams that does not look back on those days fondly. It also taught us that sometimes, the hardest things are the things most worth doing. One year was different than all the others because there was a couple of teacher in-service days during our second week of camp. This meant that our schedule was far different than usual. Our first practice began at 6 am and went until 9 and I remember that as we were sitting in a circle and stretching, one of my teammates asked our coach if we could go to the top of the stands and watch the sunrise. It was a joke, meant to demonstrate our misery. But our coach saw through that and replied, “Listen guys, this is hard. This isn’t enjoyable. But remember, for most of you, this is the last chance you’ll ever have to play football. So, enjoy it because if it was easy, everyone would do it.” That last sentence, “If it was easy, then everyone would do it.” has stuck with me throughout my life. I remembered that when I was up late studying or writing a paper in college, and I remembered that as I struggled with Hebrew and met the challenges of life at the Seminary. It is still something that comes into my mind when I feel overwhelmed, and if it doesn’t calm my anxieties, it is at least a good launch point to do so.

Throughout our readings for today this seems to be a bit of a theme. Our Old Testament lesson is the call of Ezekiel, one of the prophets that came to Israel while they were in exile in Babylon. In this story, God tells Ezekiel to preach to Israel, and to speak, “thus says the Lord God” so that they know a prophet has been among them, but does Ezekiel know what he is supposed to say? Well yes. Verses 9 and 10 of this chapter state, “**And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.**” Ezekiel was called to give Israel a message they did not want to hear, yet that did not deter God from using him to proclaim His Word. As God said at the beginning in verse 5, “**And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.**” Whether or not the message is received should not be the concern of Ezekiel, rather that is the concern and responsibility of those hearing it and it should not daunt Ezekiel or tamp down his zeal. Jesus tells the disciples something similar, “**…And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.**” Now remember that Jesus is telling them this after they saw him rejected by his own hometown. It would be as if the championship winning team returned home, only to be told they weren’t wanted there anymore. Naturally, the idea of going out and preaching to people who might reject you is a daunting task. After all, how easy do you find it to carry on a biblical conversation? Is it something that you look forward to when the family comes over for dinner or is it a topic better left for another day? Are there people in our lives, that we purposefully avoid having these types of conversations with?

One of the things that comes up every year is the fact that we shouldn’t talk about things like politics or religion at large family gatherings. Why? Because it’s uncomfortable and confrontational of course and we don’t want to spoil our time together. It is unfortunate for us then, that we are given the Word of God to preach and share with one another, because there is little that is more confrontational to our lifestyles than the Word of God itself. God’s message for humanity, and Jesus’ as well, is not something that our worldly consciences and desires do not wish to hear, and that is as true for the rest of the world as it is for us. I think that this hesitancy and this need for acceptance in our society is one of the main contributing factors as to why we have seen such a decline in attendance over the course of the preceding decades. The church and Christians at large have become afraid of sharing the word of God and it has created this quiet acceptance that has allowed a myriad of unacceptable behaviors to infiltrate the church. It has come to the point where in some churches, the message of God has become the same as the message of the culture. In other cases, Christians and the church simply remain silent, and this I think is the big one. The silence that has come out of the church at large as things like marriage, sex, and children are discussed in such a way that it truly is appalling. Yes, homosexuality spits in the face of marriage, but so does pornography, divorce, and living together outside of marriage, all major problems that don’t seem to get the same amount of attention as homosexuality does. Christians at large have remained silent about the hookup culture that pervades throughout our college and university campuses. We have remained largely silent when suddenly our families no longer appear in church, or their spiritual lives are suddenly left abandoned like a car on the side of the road. I think part of the reason for the silence, like I stated before, is due to our fear of being rejected and ridiculed. After all, being a Christian who wears their faith on their sleeve is not very popular right now.

My message for you today is the same as it was for Ezekiel and the disciples, tell people the good news, and should they reject you, the Word has been proclaimed in their midst. Fear of rejection or persecution is not an excuse to withhold the Word of God and keep it to ourselves. After all, that is not what we are charged to do. For ours is a message of joy! Ours is a message that is far more beautiful than any acceptance society can give us, for ours is the message of God’s acceptance of us. Despite the fact that we are unclean, that we are sinners in thought word and deed as we have confessed here today, God accepts us as His children through our baptism. Jesus accepts our sin and bears it on his shoulders as we receive the forgiveness of sins. That is the message that we have been given. While the law accuses us, it does exactly what it is supposed to do, it convicts us. It convicts us of our sin and brings us to repentance. When your actions make you feel guilty, that is the Law working in you, bringing turmoil to your conscience. Speaking as a millennial, the world has taught us that this guilt is dangerous to us. Rather the opposite is true. It is healthy for us, for it brings us back to God so that we can repent and feel the true sweetness of the Gospel. Friends in Christ I urge you to speak the Word of God truly and faithfully, for that is what each and every baptized child of God has been called to do. Do not be daunted by the fact that you may be looked at as crazy or backwards. Embrace the challenge, because if it was easy, everyone would do it. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds now and forever.