

Grace Lutheran Church

The Rev. P. Stevens Lynn – Sermon

Sunday, July 8, 2018

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Mark 6:1-13

*Grace to you and Peace from God Our Father and
Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen*

Going home to preach. It wasn't easy for Jesus; I suspect it's not easy for anyone.

I have been invited home to Bellwood to preach. Once when I was still in seminary, and then another time before my surgeries a few years ago. I told you about the time when I was in seminary and went home. I talked about it in a sermon from this pulpit about nine years ago. When I was in seminary and preached at home that time (probably 1981), there was an issue that congregation in Bellwood was dealing with, and I believed the congregation was headed in the wrong direction – so I told them so in that sermon. Now picture it: Me – 26 or 27 years old, still in seminary – these are my faith mothers and fathers – and me telling them they're wrong! How do you think that went over that day? Yeah! Not so well. Why? Because it was a terrible sermon? No, I don't think it was. The reason the folks didn't receive it, or only heard a piece of it was because it was given by me. They stumbled over Jesus that day because I was Jesus' messenger. They knew me too well. They stumbled over my humanity.

A few years ago, I went back again to Bellwood, this time to celebrate the 130th anniversary of the church. It was called a “homecoming celebration.” Many past members were invited back. It was fun and a great day for me. I preached the sermon. It wasn’t controversial at all. But did the congregation really hear what I had to say about Jesus that day? I’m not sure. There were people there I didn’t know – people who joined since I moved away in 1978. The sermon was probably okay for them. But the older crowd, people in their 80’s, some 90’s – who were my Sunday School teachers and Little League coaches and faith models – they were just happy to see Lois and me – to see little Stevie Lynn back home and a pastor. For them, I could have sung two verses of Home Home on the Range, sat down and they would have still been impressed. Then, there were the people there that day who really knew me. People my age, people I was in catechism and high school with – people from my neighborhood – who were not at all amazed or impressed by my being a pastor – they were a bit amazed that I was called to be a pastor. They knew me – and believe me I was a typical kid out of the 60’s and 70’s. Very typical – you know what I mean!

Both times when I went back home, there were people there that stumbled over Jesus – the Word of God – not because of Jesus – but because of me. They knew me too well.

Jesus' home town crowd stumbled over him too. Jesus had been away for a while. But while away, he happened to miraculously feed 5,000 people, to quiet a massive storm, and to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead – pretty impressive resume`. But then he came home to preach. And you heard what they said. I get it. “Isn't that Mary's boy? He and his brothers and sisters played with our kids, and didn't he fix our kitchen table once? We know him! He couldn't have done all that stuff people say.” But he did! They were offended, not by Jesus' holiness, but at his humanity – and because of that they stumbled on his ministry to them. You know, we stumble over Jesus too – and Jesus isn't even from State College. We stumble over him for a couple of reasons. One is that he – King Jesus, Messiah, Savior, Lord Jesus comes to us in the same way he came to his home town – with humility and as a servant. He comes to us plain and simple – words from here (pulpit), in wafer, wine and water, in our daily prayers and interactions and thoughts with people. He comes to us in a hug and smile, and in the need of the homeless, and in the cries of children and parents suffering. He comes to us in the rescue efforts of Thai navy divers – now trying to bring those twelve trapped boys to safety. Sometimes Jesus comes to us in a dream that we ignore or in a happening that we call a coincidence. Jesus comes to us simply and humbly – that's why it's easy to ignore him or stumble over him. And sometimes we stumble over Jesus because he challenges us and scares us and makes us

uncomfortable. So we ignore him – he can't be talking to me. After all, we're saved by grace, not works – but isn't it irresponsible and wrong to ignore the one who saves us. But we do. We stumble over what we know Jesus wants us to do – like give sacrificially – 10% is a good benchmark – give that to the poor and the church. Like forgive as you are forgiven, like don't be so judgmental – for when you are – Jesus may just offer you a rock to throw. We stumble over what Jesus wants – like be accepting and inclusive of those whose lifestyle is not wrong or illegal or hurtful in any way to others, but just different from ours. We stumble over what Jesus wants – like being more attentive to the needs of your family, like caring about how we should be in partnership with God's creation and not just taking from it. And how about that last part of our Gospel lesson today. Jesus sent them out two by two to proclaim the Gospel of love and care and service. He calls us to do it also. But we stumble at that one too. "Oh," you say, "I can't do that. That word of Jesus is not for me. I can't carry Jesus' love and care to anyone." Really? To say that means we're stumbling here.

You know there are many things you can do to live your life so people see Jesus' love and grace and humility and service in what you do. A life where people see how much you love your family, your church, see how generous you are, see how you humbly serve and care. That stuff – that way of loving life is attractive to others – and when they wonder and sometimes even ask – why are you

giving yourself away so much – you can tell them that all that stuff – that kind of loving, comes from Jesus. When someone wonders why you are loving and giving and accepting – tell them – be ready to tell them.

There are many reasons why we seem to stumble over Jesus so much. And we're human – we do it – I sure do. But it helps me to stumble less – when I'm constantly aware that Jesus loves me so. He does. Jesus loves you! *Amen.*