

Pastor Joe Polzin
Mark 6:1-13
“Crossing the Line”
Year B – Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 8, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

It was *supposed* to be a day that left everyone feeling good. Hugs and kisses from family. Handshakes and pats on the back from friends and former co-workers. Even admiration from those who perhaps hadn't known him so well before, but had now heard of all that he had been doing.

He was a well-respected teacher. He was doing mighty works. Word had gotten around, and they were proud – one of their own, doing great things. And so on that Sabbath, the synagogue was probably crowded, unusually packed, in fact. The whole town coming out, to listen to Jesus preach...

But Jesus didn't say what they expected him to say. They were *astonished*, and not in a good way. They began to say to one another, “*Who does this guy think he is? Where did he get these things? Why is he speaking like this?*” And so the day that began with such anticipation and promise, ended with the people mad, disappointed, and most of all, they were *offended*.

So, what did Jesus say? What words did he speak that were so offensive? Well, Mark doesn't tell us here, but he did tell us earlier what Jesus' message was as he went around preaching. It was: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; *repent and believe in the Gospel*” (Mark 1:15). Repent, because they are sinners. They've done what is wrong and not done what is right. They've spoken hurtfully, and their thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin.

So, repent, and believe that the One spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament, the One who would do the works of God, the One who would save them from their sins, is here. And not just “here” in a general sense, but *here* - sitting before them and speaking to them today. The kingdom of God is at hand for the King is at hand. Jesus was saying, “Repent of yourselves and believe in me.” And because of that, they were offended.

Now, were they offended at *who* he claimed to be? That this man, who they knew as “the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon,” were they offended that this man claimed to be something *more* than that? Perhaps that was part of it. But they could have simply dismissed what he was saying and dismissed him as a lunatic. At least he would have been be *their* lunatic, especially if he was willing to do some of those mighty works for them.

But what really offended them about Jesus, what really crossed the line, was not only what he claimed about himself, but what he claimed about *them*. Because if he was the Savior, that meant they were the sinners. And he was calling them to repentance. He could have talked about himself all he wanted, but once he started talking about *them*, and accusing *them*—that's what was offensive; that was crossing the line!

And that's generally the way it is today, isn't it? People are usually fine with you believing whatever you want, and doing whatever you want, as long you keep it within the walls of your church and your home. Now, most people like churches doing some nice community service projects, a food distribution, for instance. But it would be considered *crossing the line* if you brought what you believe out for *everyone else* to see or hear. Don't talk about your beliefs

in public, in politics, or in schools. Don't speak out against what the world believes or likes or thinks. Don't insinuate that there's sin the world, and especially not in their lives. Because *that* would be downright offensive. *That* would be crossing the line.

But it's not just "them," non-Christians, and the world out there. *It's us, too.* It's you and me. Because if Jesus were standing here today, he'd cross the line and offend you too. Because he wouldn't let you get away with your sins. He would call you repentance too. He wouldn't let you hear his Word and then allow you to leave here like nothing ever happened. He'd confront you about why your Bible hasn't been open all week, or why you've not spoken to him in prayer. He'd confront you about why you're too ashamed to speak about him to your friends and neighbors. He'd ask why you haven't lifted a finger to reach out to those folks who haven't been in church for a while. Or why you're always looking do the least you can do, not the most, for others.

He'd condemn you for the grudges you hold and your lack of forgiveness. He'd confront you with how uncaring and hurtful your words and actions are, especially to your family and to your church family. He'd ask why you continue to do what you know is wrong and then act like it doesn't even matter. He'd ask why you continue to be more concerned about your own name and reputation rather than his. *And that's just getting started.* He could go through and name all your false gods, all those things you fear, love, and trust more than him by what you say, what you think, and what you do.

And the truth we would find, if we were bold enough to admit it, is that Jesus isn't the offensive one. *We are.* We've just become nose-blind to our own stench, and hard-hearted to our own sin. *We're* the ones who've *crossed the line*: the line from God to Satan, from holiness to sin, from life to death, from heaven to hell.

We once had everything we needed in a perfectly created world with God. But we gave it all up when Satan convinced us that the grass was greener on the other side. And once we jumped, we realized it wasn't a pasture waiting for us, but rather a cesspool of sin and death. Yes, Jesus is offensive to sinners, because to truly acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord, and to acknowledge your need for him means that you acknowledge your own sin, your own offensiveness, and your own guilt in crossing the line.

Which is what makes Jesus so amazing. In regards to that line between righteousness and sin, that line between godliness and ungodliness, every other religion or belief system in this world will have you doing one of three things. They'll encourage you to *deny* that the line even exists so that you won't have admit the offensiveness of your sin; or they'll encourage you to *move* the line in order to accommodate your sin, saying it's okay; or they'll encourage you to believe that it's up to *you* to cross back over that line yourself, to earn your way back to God by your own strength.

But none of those are possible, as we are "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Instead, what we find is something much greater. What we find is that Jesus *does* cross the line, he willingly crossed the line that separates us from him, so that he could deal with that line for us. When Jesus became a human being, he crossed over from holiness and purity and righteousness, into the worst, foulest, smelliest place – our sin-drenched world. He crossed over that line for you. To take all your offense, all your stench, all your sin, all your death, all your hell, upon himself. "[God] made him to be sin who knew no sin..." (2 Cor. 5:21).

At the cross, he took *you*, sinner that you are, upon himself, so that in his dying and rising, *you* might die and rise with him as well (Rom. 6). Jesus redeemed you from the curse of sin by becoming the curse itself. Jesus embodied your sin on the cross, suffering the wrath of

God for you, so that in exchange, you would not receive death, but you would receive the life of righteousness he earned for you. Jesus crossed the line for you.

Now, when we approach Jesus, we don't come to him in any way other than in humility and repentance. We don't look up at the cross with haughty indifference, acting as if we don't need it. We fall at the foot of the cross, face in the dirt, knowing it's here, in the blood, in the wounds, in the death of our Lord that we find what life truly is.

So, stop denying the line, stop trying to move the line, or trying to cross back over that line yourself. You can't. Only Jesus can. And he has. Repent in your weaknesses and be strong in him. And that's what St. Paul says: "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

In our weakness caused by sin, we repent. Repentance is a form of dying. It's the killing of our pride, our self-esteem, our high opinion of ourselves, our belief that we can do things on our own without God's help – and naturally, that's a hard thing to do, that our sinful nature doesn't want to accept. None of us wants to admit that we are weak. That we *need* to die to our sins. It's so much more appealing to think we have the strength to make things better on our own.

But we can't. And we need Jesus. We need a Savior. We need his grace and his power. And in our weakness, Jesus comes to us and says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). When we repent and believe, the most amazing thing happens. Christ makes us strong. Christ crosses the line and gives us his strength in the midst of our weakness.

In fact, it's a Christian's prayer to ask Jesus to *keep* crossing the line for our sake. We pray it every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. We say, "Thy kingdom come." What does this mean? *The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.* We pray for God's kingdom to come to us. Jesus was bringing his kingdom that day in the synagogue: the kingdom was there, in him. Now we pray for Christ to bring his kingdom to us. What does that look like?

It looks like the Holy Spirit crossing over to you, coming to you to lead you in repentance. And upon your realizing your sin, He comes to give you faith, to give you Jesus. Believing in him and his forgiveness. Strengthening your faith, even when you're weak. The kingdom coming to you looks like Jesus washing you clean and giving you his robe of righteousness in baptism. It looks like Jesus washing the grime of your daily life of sin off your feet, by the forgiving words of absolution. It looks like Jesus feeding you with the bread of life, his Body and Blood, in his Supper, in communion. And all of this is a foretaste of that eternal kingdom that's on the other side of the line. God's side. The kingdom that He has prepared for you in eternity, and has begun to give you even now.

What Jesus did in the synagogue in Nazareth that day is really what takes place here every Sunday. Jesus comes to us, speaks to us, and makes claims—about himself, and about us. And we can be offended, perhaps we need to be offended. But we also repent. And our prayers for God's kingdom to come are answered, here. The kingdom is indeed at hand. The kingdom of God is here for you. Christ, your Savior, is here for you, with his gifts, with his forgiveness. He has crossed the line for you, so that he may bring you back with him into his eternal kingdom forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.