

**Do You Believe?**  
**July 4<sup>th</sup> Sermon**  
**Mark 6:1-6**  
**Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb**

Fred Craddock once said that there are two kinds of sermons people don't like – bad sermons and good sermons.

It's easy to see why people don't like bad sermons, however you define bad.

It's puzzling why people wouldn't like good sermons. Well, I think what Craddock meant by a good sermon is one where God's word is clearly preached and the people of God are convicted and charged with obeying it.

Why wouldn't people like that kind of sermon? Well, believe it or not, some people don't want to hear that we are to supposed to really believe and live out our faith.

I'll never forget an angry man coming to see me in my office. He was upset over a sermon I preached. He proceeded to tell me that his wife had invited their annoying next-door neighbors over for dinner. They were the type of neighbors who were always being written up by the HOA. Unkempt yard, loud music, kids wreaking havoc in the neighborhood. One day my angry parishioner's wife said to him, "We are Christians and we have neighbor spoken to them. We need to have them over for dinner."

He said to me, "I want you to know that you put that idea in her head with one of your sermons. Thanks, pastor. I never expected her to take your sermons so seriously."

It never occurred to him to actually believe his own faith. I was amazed. Here was a guy who attended worship every week. I don't know why. He wasn't taken it seriously.

Jesus was all too familiar with those who lacked faith. Much of it didn't surprise him. After all, he knew some people just don't have ears to hear.

But nothing surprised Jesus more than the lack of faith he found among his hometown people. In our text for today we find Jesus visiting the people he grew up with in Nazareth – his childhood friends, his relatives, his own family. You

would think they would've been his biggest supporters. Instead, they rejected him and couldn't believe, would not believe, he was the Messiah.

In fact, the text says they "took offense at him." They said, "Isn't this Mary's son?" In other words, "Isn't this the same little kid that ran around the neighborhood. Where does he get off? Who does he think he is?"

They were too familiar with Jesus to appreciate him.

It is possible to be too close to something to appreciate it. We lived in Orlando for a few years and were always amazed how many people we met who had lived there for years and had never visited the Magic Kingdom. Of course, before I get too high and mighty, I will say that for ten years we lived within walking distance from the beautiful beaches of St. Pete, Florida and I can count on one hand the times I went to the beach.

Did you know there are people who live in New York City who have never visited the Statue of Liberty?

There are also those who have known Jesus their entire lives but have never really spoken to him.

Could it be that some of us are so familiar with Jesus that we don't really appreciate him and his power?

To me, the saddest and most disappointing words in all of scripture appear in our text for today, "And he could do no deed of power there..." Can you believe that? Other than heal a few people Jesus could not display his power in his own hometown? Why? Because they refused to listen and believe!

Not even Christ can work in those who refuse to listen and believe. Christ will not force his love and power on us. He tried to preach to his own friends and family, but he could do no deed of power there because of their unbelief.

One of the thoughts that often haunts me is whether or not I am holding Jesus back from displaying his power in my life. How often have we dampened the power of Jesus? How often has Jesus' own eternal family, the church, prevented his amazing work because we refuse to believe?

Let me ask you: When you arrived today for worship were you expecting God to move in your life or speak to you in some way? And when you leave here do you really believe Jesus goes with you? Do you believe he guides and empowers you?

Or have we become so familiar with Jesus that we don't have that kind of expectancy and belief anymore?

Donald Strobe once said, "Sometimes we know everything there is to know about our Christian faith except to experience it for ourselves." We are proud of our good theology. We can quote chapter and verse. We have head knowledge of the faith, but there is no heart knowledge. We can talk a good game but Christ can do no deed of power in our hearts because we refuse to believe.

Donald Strobe tells the story of a group of religion editors of secular newspapers who were meeting in the Hyatt Regency hotel, and they were in the elevator on their way down to dinner. They had on their badges words that identified their convention as a "Religious Editors' Convention." A man stepped into the elevator swearing and carrying on. When he noticed the badge on his elevator neighbor, he apologized profusely to him. "Don't worry about it," said the editor, "I am not religious, I am just a religious editor."

Some people are like that: they go through life being "religious editors." They gossip about the sins of others but never talk about their own sins. They are "sermon samplers" and church shoppers wandering from church to church, quick to pick up on the imperfections of the preacher or the church. They are happy to point out mistakes in the bulletin but have an excuse when asked to volunteer for a ministry. These are the folks who dampen the power of Christ with their cynicism and lack of faith.

The text says that Jesus was "amazed at their lack of faith." Some translations say, "He marveled at their lack of faith." I wonder how often Jesus marvels at our lack of faith. I wonder how often Jesus shakes his head thinking, "Why can't they just get out of my way and believe?"

The clear message of today's text is that if we had more faith in Jesus he could do more with us! It is the truth! The health and vitality of a church is dependent on that church's level of expectancy and belief in Jesus. If we don't believe, if we are not willing to become open vessels, there is only so much God can do through us.

We do amazing ministry as a church, but I believe with all my heart that God could do a lot more in and through this congregation if we would simply believe and allow him to use us.

How sad would it be if at the judgment the record showed that Christ could not do a mighty work in Johns Creek because of our unbelief?

Or what if the record said the same about our wonderful country? Today we celebrate our freedom as Americans. Our freedom is precious and we should celebrate it. But there are some Christians are always ranting and raving about how our country is going to pot. Values and moral are eroding. They are quick to point fingers at what they believe are the reasons for our country's deficiencies.

But could it be that the honest to goodness truth is that the church has lost its influence and power in America? And could it be that the reason the church has lost its influence and power is because many Christians are quick to declare their independence but slow to declare their dependence on God?

You talk to some Christians and they are religious zealots about their political views or political party or the American way, but silent about their love and belief in Jesus. They seem to have more faith in their politics than they do in God. They love their freedom, but the question is what are they doing with that freedom?

The freedom we enjoy as Americans is glorious. There is no freedom more glorious or precious for Americans than religious freedom. You woke up this morning and were free to choose whatever church you wanted to worship in. You could have chosen high liturgy or low liturgy. You could have chosen contemporary worship or traditional worship. You could have chosen to listen to a soft preacher or a loud preacher. You could have chosen a church where they dance in the aisles or a church where they sit in contemplative silence. You could have chosen to worship in any church you desired.

No dictator or government told you where you had to worship, how you had to worship, or what you had to worship.

So, what are you doing with that freedom? Are you using it for the glory of God and his power?

**“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” -2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7:14**

Today, we celebrate all of our blessings as Americans, and all that we have, all that we have been given. And it is important that we celebrate. But remember what the Bible says, “To whom much is given, much is required.” How will we use the blessings we enjoy? For corruption, for self-indulgence? How will we as Christians use our freedom? Will we share with those we love the gospel of Christ as freely as we share our patriotism? Will we speak out against those things our government does that is contrary to the will of God? Will we remember that our religion is personal, but never private? Will we name the issues that need our faith, and not lose our faith in political battles? Will we speak up and speak for the oppressed and the exploited and the abused?

Will we believe and allow our Lord and Savior to do a mighty work in and through us?

The resounding question for us as Christians on this Fourth of July weekend is not how big and bold our fireworks will be, but how big and bold is our belief in God to do a mighty work through us.

At the judgment, when all the nations have bowed before God and the kingdoms of the world become the Kingdom of God, God will hold us accountable. God will say, “You lived in a free country. You had no restrictions. No limitations – an abundance of resources and tools – plenty of opportunities. Tell me, what did you do with it?” What will we say?

Oh, let’s celebrate our freedom today. But, in the name of Christ, let’s do something with it. Let’s take God at his word and allow him to do a mighty work through us.