

Petticoats from Heaven

^{NRS} **Mark 6:1** He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Well yesterday we remembered 233 years since the American colonists threw off the yoke of the British empire. Now, I don't know what you learned about the American revolution when you were a kid, but the story I was taught was pretty simple. Basically it was the scrappy Americans who didn't have much in the way of guns or uniforms but had guts and the yearning to be free- against the evil Red Coats who were forcing us to drink tea, un-American tea, and making us pay huge taxes for the privilege. Very simple. Us and them. Honest, hard working 'Mericans versus the hoity toity English. And, because we were smart and they were not- we would intelligently hide behind trees and rocks while they were still foolishly fighting in these big, exposed ranks. And so even though they had huge ships and big cannons and fancy uniforms- they didn't have a chance. That's the story I learned as a kid, anyway.

Of course the actual story is way more complicated. It always is, isn't it? And I think the most important thing missing from the standard version, something that just makes so much common sense is that it wasn't just "us" against "them"- there was much more diversity than this. You had your Indians who fought on both sides of the war, for one. And then the Americans, the colonists- why they themselves were divided. The colonists *themselves* didn't actually agree over what to do with the English. No one liked taxation without representation- but a huge number of the colonists, especially the powerful and wealthy ones who were doing pretty- they thought fighting against the English would be about as good an idea as their English cooking was bad.

And so it turns out that many historians believe that the Patriots, people like Paul Revere, they were actually more frustrated by loyalists, by Americans who were against Revolution, than they were by the English. It was because of the loyalists the Sons of Liberty had to be a secret society- skulking around in secret in the middle of the night. And because of their frustration the Sons of Liberty were reduced to thuggish behavior like tarring and feathering loyalists and dressing up as Indians for the Boston Tea Party- things we may like today but were unpopular at the time.

And what was interesting to me about the loyalists- they weren't against the revolution because they thought the English were unbeatable. It was because they didn't think the English could be beaten by *these* guys, by these so-called Sons of Liberty. And I get this- I mean the loyalists lived with the patriots- they knew them by name, they went to school with them, they knew everything about them. And to them- they just weren't that impressive. I mean they weren't the famous people we've come to know- they didn't

revere Paul Revere- he was just ol' Paul to them. And familiarity, you know, breeds contempt.

I wonder if that what was going on with those people in Jesus' hometown. I wonder if they just knew too much about him to be impressed. I mean the text starts out so hopeful. Jesus has been running around all over the place. He's been doing healings. Working miracles. He's been teaching and just blowing people away. And then Mark tells us, and then he's coming back home. And you think how great is THIS going to be? I mean if outsiders like him- how much more is the hometown crowd going to be excited by their guy.

And everything's looking good. He's invited to preach. And the time comes. And everyone shows up to synagogue. But then, well- it's just awful. The people who show up, if they were excited at all- well they aren't after he gets going. And from what Mark tells us- it seems they are so caught up with who they *knew* him to be, they just can't see him for the amazing person he has become. But they aren't. They are so caught up with who they knew him to be- they can't see him for the amazing person he has *become*. They can only see the little boy who ran around with his tunic up over his head. They can only see the carpenter who never went to school. And who is he, really, to think he can just talk to them like he knows anything more than they do? And they can only see the brother, the older brother to that family- the older brother that should be there providing for everyone, the older brother that should be looking after the family but who left to make a fool of himself and the whole village.

And the word Mark to describe them- oh it's so strong. Our translation says they are offended by him- but this is pathetic. The word Mark uses is that they are scandalized by him. Scandalized! The word here is literally *eskandalizonto* from the root *skandalizo*. Now this word, *skandalizo*, it's so interesting. Originally a *skandalon* is a trap- it's like a pit you dig in the ground and cover up with sticks and leaves and branches. And someone comes along and falls in. And then this becomes a metaphor- and someone is a scandal to you if they're something you get stuck on- something that just bothers you so much you can hardly see straight.

Mark says that's what Jesus is like to these folks. He's a scandal to them. They're so stuck on who he was- they just can't get past that to see who he is. And it's just driving them crazy. Luke says they're so mad they actually try to throw him off a cliff!

Now, honestly this doesn't really surprise me. I mean it would have been nice if they would have thrown him a big party and if the mayor would have given him the keys to the town and if they would have renamed the day Jesus day, or something. But people who walk around telling people to pray for their enemies, and that rich people trying to get into heaven are like camels trying to squeeze themselves through needles...well people who say things like this just aren't popular. Never have been.

So, really it's not a huge shock that they are so scandalized by him. The weird thing about this text is that they aren't the only ones who are flustered. See, it seems that Jesus is every bit as scandalized by *them* as they are by *him*. When the crowds are so scandalized by Jesus, and when he quips back to them that prophets are never appreciated

in their home town or by the ones that know them best, it's then that something *really* strange happens. Or rather doesn't happen. In verse 5 Mark tells us that Jesus is unable to work any miracles there. The only thing he's able to muster is a couple of little healings, but that's it.

And in case you're wondering well maybe the Greek really means he just didn't want to do any miracles or something like that- it doesn't. It's crystal clear. It's not that he doesn't want to- he can't. Mark says Jesus is so astounded, so shocked by their lack of faith- that they are like Kryptonite to him, and he's unable to do anything in their midst.

But then- the greatest thing, the most amazing thing happens. He just goes. He just leaves and goes some place else and tries again.

When the crowds are scandalized by Jesus- that's it. They just stop. They can't believe their ears and their eyes by what they see, and rather than stretch and grow and make room in their understanding for the possibility that maybe there's something more to this carpenter than meets the eye- they just shut down their minds prefer to be shocked and horrified at this uppity carpenter.

But not Jesus. When he is equally stunned by their response, when he is unable to even be himself around them- he does something so important. He keeps moving. And even more important than this- he tries something new. After Jesus moves on and heads to those different towns- he tries something he never tried before. He gets all the disciples together, and he tells them that he needs their help. I mean it seems like a failure what happens in his hometown- that his preaching didn't work out and he wasn't able to do any miracles. But what seems like a failure was actually so important to what

would become his movement- because it's only after this failure that Christ turns the disciples into apostles. A disciple is a learner, a follower. An apostle is someone who is getting out there and putting into practice what she's learned. And while disciples are great- Jesus realizes right here that even he isn't a one man show, he needs friends who will become apostles- does not merely hearers of his word.

And you know that was another thing I learned this week about the American Revolution. You and I- we're so fascinated with heroes, with these big names and personalities. But the truth is pretty much every story we know about the big names really isn't the whole truth. Take Paul Revere for example- everyone knows the story of him riding to Lexington and Concord to warn that the British were coming. You may remember Longfellow's poem that made Revere famous: Listen up children and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere. But the truth is Revere never even would have made it to his horse had it not been for the work of a few other heroes- heroes whose names we don't even remember anymore. Esther Forbes in here Pulitzer prize winning history, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* recounts that Revere had an adventure the night of his famous midnight ride before he even made it to his horse.¹

The story begins with Dr. Joseph Warren who called Revere and Dawes to his house to give them their mission. Now there's a military curfew in effect- and even to be out in the streets at all is risking being shot on sight. But Revere and Dawes show up and hear the news about the British and the lanterns in the Church tower- one if by land and two if by sea. And Warren sends them out- Revere is to take the most direct route, but he'll have to cross the Back Bay over the Charleston River to get to the horse they have

¹ Forbes, Esther: *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In*, p. 256.

waiting for him. Dawes has the longer route, but he goes by horse the whole way. So they both set out- Dawes on horse back and Revere on foot.

So Revere makes it to the Charleston and finds the boat and small crew waiting, but then he sees terrible sight- right in the middle of the bay is an enormous ship, the HMS Somerset, which is this massive man o' war filled with British marines. And Revere realizes something worse- that he made it all this way and he forgot to bring dampening cloths to silence the creaking of the oars in the oarlocks as they rowed, and he checks with the crew and they don't have any either. Now even with dampeners it looked nearly impossible to cross the bay without being seen and blown out of the water by that massive ship. But without anything to silence the oars- they were dead for sure. Now any normal person would turn back at this point- they'd admit defeat and just hope that Dawes would make it through. But Revere just stops to think- and then one of the crew comes up with an idea. The young man actually runs down the street, whistles high up at a window on the second story, and it opens to reveal a young woman, the man's girl friend. Then, the young man whispers to this young woman something no one can understand. And to everyone's shock, she removes her petticoats, her underwear, and throws them down. And then, and Revere remembers the petticoats being "still warm" they tear them into strips that muffle the oars. And after a harrowing trip across the bay they somehow make it without alerting the Somerset. And only then, only after this does Revere find his horse and make his famous ride.

But without these two heroes- these two unnamed and mostly unremembered souls, Paul Revere just wouldn't have been Paul Revere.

God needs heroes in this world- people who take extraordinary risks and who do extraordinary things. No doubt about that. But you know I wonder if God doesn't need more ordinary folks a little more, folks whose names will never make the history books- just the regular people with a big enough hope to believe that what they have to give, even something as small as a pair of flying undies, now and then just might make a difference. **Amen.**