

Scripture:

Mark 6:1-13

“Mission impossible.”

Anyone remember the TV series Mission impossible?

It started back in 1966 and ran for 7 years and then was picked up once again 23 years later in 1996 only this time for the big screen ---- starring Tom Cruise as agent Ethan Hunt.

I myself only really know the movies --- I’m too young for the TV series don’t you know.

If you know about either series --- TV or film --- then by now you’ve likely got that little tune in your head ----

And along with the tune ----- the other famous trademark of Mission Impossible were the opening lines ---- “Good morning Mr. Hunt ---- Your mission --- should you choose to accept it ...” ----- followed by a brief description of the mission itself --- followed by the closing words ----- “This message will self destruct in 5 seconds.”

Indeed in Mission Impossible 2 the opening dialogue goes like this ----

“Good morning Mr. Hunt. --- Your mission --- should you choose to accept it ---- involves the recovery of a stolen item designated “Chimera”. You may select any two team members ---- but it is essential that the third member of your team be Nyah Nordoff-Hall.

She is a civilian ---- and a highly capable professional thief.

You have forty-eight hours to recruit Miss Hall and meet me in Seville to receive your assignment.

As always --- should any member of your team be caught or killed --- the Secretary will disavow all knowledge of your actions.

And Mr. Hunt --- the next time you go on holiday please be good enough to let us know where you’re going. This message will self destruct in five seconds.”

This week ---- as I read over our gospel passage for this morning --- I immediately thought of Mission Impossible.

Jesus --- your mission --- should you choose to accept it

Disciples of Christ --- your mission --- should you choose to accept it ...

As Jesus preaches and teaches in His home town it's practically a Mission Impossible.

“When the Sabbath came --- he began to teach in the synagogue --- and many who heard him were amazed.” --- verse 2 says.

Or a more faithful translation of the original Greek ---- might read --- “astonished” or perhaps even “frustrated” ---- instead of “amazed.”

“When the Sabbath came --- he began to teach in the synagogue --- and many who heard him were astonished and frustrated.”

And then the next couple of verses ---

““Where did this man get these things?” They asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.”

In other words ----- they were astonished and frustrated by this man --- where did He get off doing these things --- where did His wisdom come from ---- isn’t He just the carpenter from down the way --- you know the brother of Mike, Peter, Frank and John ---- and aren’t His sisters still around town too ---- this is offensive --- Him marching around pretending to be someone special ---- He’s just a regular guy like us ---- one of us ---- a local from down the way.

That’s the reaction Jesus got in His home town.

Sometimes the conditions are such that it is virtually impossible to make a contribution or difference in a place.

Sometimes the conditions are such that it is practically mission impossible.

Such were the conditions for Jesus in His home town.

And now for Jesus' reply to all this astonishment and frustration.

Verse 4 --- "Jesus said to them ---- "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town ---- among his relatives --- and in his own home."

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In other words sometimes it's mission impossible.

Specifically ---- for Jesus teaching and preaching around His home town ----
- was Mission Impossible.

And this still often applies still today ---

How many times have you witnessed or have yourself been the one saying something at work or at home and no one recognizes or even reacts to its truth.

You're ignored in your familiarity.

And then someone else comes in ---- maybe its for a work shop or seminar at work ---- or maybe it's a neighbour or friend at home and says the exact same thing you've been saying for some time now ----- only this time everyone suddenly stops and takes notice.

And --- as if that isn't enough --- they then draw it to your attention ----- as if it's new information ---- never before heard.

You have been saying it all along for years --- but no one listens.

And then suddenly a newbie comes in --- says the exact same things --- and everyone halts and reacts as though Yoda --- or some wise sage ----- has just walked in.

Anyone that's married knows all about this --- husbands for sure know about this --- as I'm sure wives do too.

“A prophet is not without honour except in his own town ---- among his relatives --- and in his own home.”

Sometimes ---- Mission impossible among our own.

And then wisest of wise among others --- even though the exact same things are said.

Even though the message shared --- the words uttered --- can be identical --- the reception can be radically different precisely because of conditions --- preconceived notions and perceptions ----prejudices in place.

The expectations and preconceived notions in Jesus' hometown preclude the possibility of Him ever amounting to anything much ----- let alone a prophet --- or the Saviour of the world --- and Son of God.

Instead of being recognized for His miracles --- and healings and teaching -- ---- He's pretty much just dismissed as a hometown kid putting on airs.

Why?

Because He simply doesn't stand up well to their preconceived --- and mal conceived criteria as to what a religious leader out to be.

He's not influential enough --- or prestigious enough ---- or successful enough so they dismiss Him.

And they do so even though He did indeed heal people ---- which in itself is of course miraculous.

Verse 5 in Mark's gospel today reads ---- “He could not do any miracles here ---- except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.”

There are two things that stand out in these verses --- 1. He couldn't do any miracles except ---- “except”.

Except what --- except a few healing miracles ----- so He did indeed perform a few miracles --- He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.

There are circumstances sometimes in life that dictate that no matter what we do --- it will never be recognized as remarkable.

Healing people is pretty remarkable --- miraculous even ----- but not here --- Jesus is too close to home for it to be recognized as anything special.

Conditions are sometimes such that nothing can ever change perceptions.

Sometimes we can no good no matter what because people's minds are so closed ----- or so hard --- or so shut off ----- that virtually nothing will change them or open them up to anything new or different.

I don't think it was ever actually the case that Jesus couldn't perform miracles at home --- I think it was such that no matter what He did it would never amount to anything.

Jesus could have done miracle after miracle after miracle in His home town and no matter what it would always be explained away in some other way than --- "He performed a miracle."

It was a "Mission Impossible" --- set of circumstances.

And there's a second thing about --- "He could not do any miracles here ---- except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith." ----- that stands out.

"He was amazed at their lack of faith."

"He was amazed at their lack of faith."

I'm pretty sure that not too many things truly amazed Jesus ----- but the lack of faith of those in His home town certainly did.

Clearly they couldn't see anything through eyes of faith.

Instead they discounted any and everything He did.

Mission Impossible ---- or so it seems.

And then after these verses of Jesus talking about being dishonoured in His home town and rejected --- He goes on --- in the second half of our gospel reading today ----- to send out His Disciples.

And how He describes their sending out and the preparations and planning they are to make --- seems like a Mission Impossible kind of venture too.

Picking it up at verse 8 in Mark's gospel today -----

“These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff --- no bread --- no bag --- no money in your belts.

Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.

When ever you enter a house --- stay there until you leave that town.

And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you --- leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

Pretty harsh preparations --- almost impossible to follow in fact if we stop to think about it for a minute.

Take nothing --- not even food or an extra shirt --- not even money --- just go and stay wherever you are accepted.

Oh and by the way ---- don't ever accept an upgrade to your conditions.

If you're accepted and welcomed into a home ---- stay there until you leave that place ---- don't move around.

And if you're not welcomed ---- and they don't listen to you --- take off your shoes as you leave and shake off the dirt.”

How many people can honestly say they could ever do this.

Go on a journey ---- taking nothing ----- no food --- no clothing --- no money.

And --- as if that's not enough --- not even taking any money ----- the disciples are instructed to refuse ever accepting an upgrade to their lodgings.

And then they are also told to turn and shake off the debris of any place they visited where they were not treated well and welcomed.

Kind of sounds like a Mission Impossible --- if you ask me.

In the movie Mission Impossible 2 there are these lines ---- "Mr. Hunt --- this isn't mission difficult --- it's Mission Impossible ---- difficult should be a walk in the park for you."

Agent Hunt complains about the difficulty and that is the response he gets.

"Mr. Hunt --- this isn't mission difficult ---it's Mission Impossible ---- difficult should be a walk in the park for you."

In a way that's fitting for Jesus and the disciples ---- difficult should be a walk in the park for them.

What appeared to be Mission Impossible --- and it was indeed Mission Impossible by strictly worldly standards ----- was truly only mission difficult --- a walk in the park --- precisely because they had God on their side.

And of course having God on their side ---- changes things dramatically.

And this changes things so dramatically that the conditions and the things they need to pack and bring --- become secondary to the very message and directive of God itself.

God takes Mission Impossible --- and turns it into Mission accomplished.

Forget about the IMF ---- Impossible Missions Force --- of the Mission Impossible franchise ----- we're talking about the Almighty One ---- the maker of heaven and earth ---- the "I am who I am" ---- Father --- Son -- and Holy Spirit.

The one who has made it a life mission to take the impossible and make it possible.

Jesus may not have been respected or received well in His own town.

The disciples may be packing light --- to put it mildly --- and acting boldly.

But it's far from impossible ----- this great mission ----- they embark upon.

It's a walk in the park ---- from a certain perspective ---- because God is their guide --- and host ---- and so much more.

And so it is with us.

We can glean a lot from this passage.

We're not often going to be recognized as Christians for doing the right and faithful things ---- our society and culture mostly looks down on us --- and downplays the difference Christ makes in the world.

But it's huge ----- and goes far beyond what anyone can even see or experience.

Those in Jesus' home town didn't think much of what He was doing --- not because He wasn't actually doing much --- but because they were misguided --- frigid --- and most importantly hard hearted.

There are a lot of hard hearted people in the world when it comes to Jesus Christ --- or at the very least --- indifferent ---- and "whatever" --- people.

People who approach Christ or think of Christ as just another option when it comes to what to think and believe --- as opposed to who He truly is.

They're lazy about Christ --- not really concerned --- "what's the big deal."

But ----- we're not to lose heart when we encounter folks like this --- friends --- family members --- neighbours.

Remember it was those who lived closest to Christ --- in His own town ---- who dismissed Him.

Remember the authorities may not have liked Him --- but they were far from dismissive --- indifferent.

They did after all crucify Him --- because among other things He was a threat to them.

It was only those who were closest to Christ --- in His own town ---- that dismissed Him.

It's hard when our family --- and friends --- and neighbours ---- co-workers - --- the people we want to know Jesus the most --- the people we are closest with ---- dismiss Him ---- or are indifferent to Him --- down playing it all --- -- "meh".

By the way I heard that "meh" --- you know the phrase --- "meh" ----- was accepted into the Oxford English Dictionary --- the authority of the English language.

"Meh" ---- "expressing a lack of interest or enthusiasm." ---- a verbal --- shrug of the shoulders.

Jesus --- "meh."

That's often the attitude.

Jesus --- "meh" --- whatever --- including those nearest and dearest to us ---- just as it was for Him.

But we must take heart ----- it's not mission impossible.

It's anything is possible ---- precisely because of Christ.

Our mission should we choose to accept it --- is to be like Jesus --- to share Jesus ---- to invite others to come to know Him too.

I for one --- accept the mission ----- even though it will sometimes be difficult --- and perhaps even feel impossible.

As difficult and impossible ---- as it would have been for those first disciples to take nothing for the journey ----- no food ---- no bags --- no money --- not even an extra shirt beyond just the one on their backs.

As we are about to sing together --- all the way our Saviour leads us.

All the way our Saviour does lead us.

And thankfully with Him --- anything is possible.

Mission impossible? --- not with Christ.

In Him --- anything is possible.

Amen.