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Friendship United Church
July 5, 2009
Mark 6: 1-13

Read from "Lamb" by Christopher Moore.

It is hard for us to think of Jesus as a child. Oh sure, we know the story of his birth in the stable and we hear a story about him being left behind by his parents and him teaching in the temple when he was 12. But that is the extent that we know of Jesus' childhood. Our gospel reading today gives us a glimpse of a past, he was a carpenter just like his father Joseph, and he had siblings according to the book of Mark. Try to imagine if one of your siblings had ended up being the Messiah or you for that matter. Picture them today as a prophet or even a minister. Would you see them as the authority on the subject of God, the Bible and a leader in the church or would it be easier for you to picture them screaming and crying and running to your parents as you teased them relentlessly?

Think for a moment of your childhood. The things you did; the way you thought; the trouble you got into, harmless trouble but trouble just the same.

I can remember being caught skipping school, going seeing a show I was forbidden to see; and going to the party I was not supposed to go to. Any of you have memories such as this? My father was talking recently about the things he and "the boys" used to do around town. I have to say I was a bit shocked! Let's face it no child wants to hear about their mother and father's dating habits particularly when it involves them dating other people.

Imagine for a minute the life of Jesus before he answered his call to ministry. Sometimes we forget that Jesus had a past. After all he was 30 years old when he answered his call; he had been working in another profession. What else would he have been doing up to this ripe old age of 30? This by the way was fairly old for that time and place since the average life expectancy was only about 40-50. It's hard to imagine isn't it? I have to admit that the images that come to my mind go against what I thought I knew about Jesus growing up.

Chances are pretty good that Jesus had a life very similar to yours and mine before his ministry. He lived in a community, he had a job, he must have had a home; what about a wife and children? Now that's getting into dangerous territory. For some reason we have it in our heads that all of Jesus' life was devoted to celibacy and directed only toward prayer, silence, right living; the kinds of things we assume the Son of God would pursue. But think about it he ate and drank; spent time with friends; was actually at a wedding party when he performed his first public miracle at the prompting and almost nagging of his mother. We need more to drink, change this water into wine? You can do it!

His schooling would have been learning the Torah just like all other boys his age and then taking on a trade that would get him through life. Don't you wonder why he didn't go into some form of religious leader position right after Torah graduation? Some kind of religious leader would make sense but no, Jesus becomes a carpenter, like his earthly father; perhaps taking on the family business so Dad could retire.

So why am I trying so desperately to paint this picture of this Jesus to you today? After all it is all here say anyway. Well the reason is two-fold. **First**, the book of Mark tells us that Jesus is back in his hometown and the people there show their **disbelief**. They cannot take him seriously, he is the carpenter who lived and worked among them for all those years. He is the son of Mary and Joseph, he has siblings who still live here and have their families here. He is the little boy who used to do this and that. Remember when he and James snuck into the temple and watched the priests performing their private rituals; remember when he and those boys put the school mascot up on the roof; remember how those boys took that donkey cart for a spin without permission? **He was that** Jesus to these people; how could **he** be the Messiah?

Second is this, the story in Mark tells of Jesus sending the disciples out in two's to do the work of Jesus. They had all the authority that Jesus had to perform miracles, to heal the sick, to preach the good news. This is a message for us to go forward as disciples. You see in order for us to be who God wants us to be we have to look and move forward. Staying stuck in the past only keeps us stuck and limits our ability to be effective.

Even though we all carry a past with us it is important for us to realise that where we came from has little to do with who we are today. Our identity should be about whom we have been called to be and the relationships we make because of it not who we once were. We must go to the unfamiliar in order to be most effective in our ministry. This means leaving our comfort zone and trying new things, meeting new people and experiencing life as it is today, not how it used to be.

It is easy to get stuck in the past. Many of the ideas we have about Jesus prior to his ministry have come out of the past; we have perpetuated old customs and ideas, traditions and experiences. We have given meaning to things, objects and ideas that hold us back from seeing things in a new way for us today. Some of you may know the story of the ham. A young woman was cooking a ham and in preparation she cut off the ends of the ham then placed the meat in the pan. Her friend in the kitchen with her asked why she would cut the ends off the ham. She had no answer other than her mother had always done it that way and assumed it must be done. The next time she talked with her mother she asked her mother why you needed to cut the ends off the ham before cooking it. Her mother replied, "I only did that because the ham never fit in my pan."

We have used this same analogy when it comes to the church, we have done it in one way for so long we have mistaken it for something necessary to honouring God properly.

Jesus tells the disciples to “shake the dust off their shoes” when they are not accepted or listened to meaning don’t look back, move forward embracing the present. When we let the past dominate our lives we are not free to be all we can be to those in the future. True followers of Jesus keep moving forward; ready to broaden their circles, their understanding, their compassion and their commitment to justice.

May God bless us all as we move forward in our ministry together.