**July 8, 2018**

**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**

**First Presbyterian Church**

**21 Church Street**

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**The Rev. Dr. Carrie Mitchell**

**Homecoming**

1. Boom! Many of us enjoyed fireworks this past week as we celebrated the Fourth of July.
	1. I have particularly fond memories of the fireworks held in conjunction with our High School’s homecoming.
		1. Maybe you have some fond memories of homecoming experiences.
2. Sir Paul McCartney of the Beatles recently celebrated a noteworthy homecoming.
	1. McCartney returned to his hometown of Liverpool with James Corden as a part of Corden’s recurring series “carpool karaoke”.
	2. Corden picked up McCartney and they sang Karaoke versions together of some of McCartney’s biggest hits.
	3. At one point while singing *Let it Be*, Corden emotionally recalled how both his grandfather and father had sung this song with him as a young boy to help him know that he was loved, and that God’s grace was sufficient.
	4. Corden drove McCartney to Penny Lane and they stopped in the Barber Shop and completely surprised the owners and patrons.
	5. McCartney had a triumphant homecoming.
	6. Everywhere he went, he instantly drew adoring crowds.
	7. Not so for Jesus in this morning’s texts.
3. Mark tells us Jesus leaves Capernaum and walks back to his hometown of Nazareth.
	1. He leaves the Sea of Galilee and walks back into a sea of humanity.
		1. This should be an *ideal opportunity* for Jesus to do more deeds of power.
			1. It *should* be an ideal opportunity, but it isn’t.
		2. While Jesus is in Nazareth, he does what he has become accustomed to doing in all the other cities and villages he had been visiting.
			1. He teaches in the synagogue.
	2. But during his homecoming at his own synagogue, Jesus offends the people and they retaliate by calling him illegitimate.
		1. The people’s open hostility prevents Jesus from doing any “deed of power” there.
			1. He was amazed at their unbelief.
		2. Boom! No more miraculous fireworks at this homecoming and Jesus decides to move on.
4. What things do we normally associate with homecoming?
	1. A parade with performers and floats sets the tone for a festive time.
	2. A varsity game like football or soccer gives us an opportunity to keep score and affirm our power.
		1. Just what kind of power is that?
		2. Paul writes to the church in Corinth and to us today: My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.
	3. Let us break down together what Paul means.
		1. What is power?
			1. Power in Greek is dunamis from which we get the word, dynamic.
		2. What is perfect?
			1. Telos is the Greek word for end or goal.
		3. What is weakness?
			1. The weakness of humanity is contrasted with the dynamism of God.
		4. God’s power finds its end or its goal in humanity.
	4. God’s power couldn’t meet its goal during the homecoming of Jesus in that batch of unbelieving humanity.
	5. The homecoming crowd was much more interested in keeping score than they were interested in participating in God’s grace.
	6. When we don’t live a life of grace, we are usually keeping score.
		1. Keeping score means making certain we do not owe anybody anything and that our relationship credits have been paid in full.
		2. Keeping score means anytime we are hurt, we will return the hurt.
		3. Keeping score means keeping intimate grace-filled relationships at a distance.
		4. Keeping score cripples us as it cuts us off from one another.
	7. We are floundering as a nation because we are too busy keeping score rather than building up one another and our nation in love.
5. Another thing we associate with homecomings is crowning of a Homecoming King and Queen.
	1. Talk about the ultimate version of keeping a popularity score!
		1. Two years ago, the quarter back of a football team in Fort Worth, TX did a surprisingly graceful thing.
			1. Both Max the quarterback and K.L. the equipment manager had been nominated to the homecoming court from a student body of 2,500.
			2. Max won the most votes; nonetheless, he chose to take a knee and give the crown to his long-time friend K.L. whom he thought should have won it anyway.
				1. Max said the homecoming king should be the one who gives everyone good vibes and that is what K.L. does.
			3. When asked why he gave K.L. the crown, Max said “as corny as it may sound, you have to treat everybody the way you want to be treated.”
		2. News of K.L.’s becoming Homecoming King went viral and prompted a guest appearance on the Ellen show in LA.
			1. While there, Ellen presented both K.L. and Max with checks from Shutterfly for $10K each to be used towards college.
			2. Both boys were stunned and gracefully grateful.[[1]](#footnote-1)
	2. As we saw in this grace-filled homecoming crowning, God’s grace, not keeping score, is sufficient, for power is made perfect in weakness.
6. What does Jesus do at this unwelcome reception of his homecoming?
	1. Maybe if Jesus were a two-year old or a teenager rather than a 30-year old, he might throw a temper tantrum.
		1. Instead, the text tells us, he was amazed at their unbelief and he left.
			1. He taught in the other villages.
	2. Mike Tyson (yes, the tattoo-faced, formerly-imprisoned, retired boxer) once said “Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face.”
		1. He would know, I guess!
		2. I love this line, not because I plan on ever stepping into the boxing ring, but because I think it’s actually an important bit of wisdom we can apply – metaphorically – to our lives.
		3. It’s easy to stick with a plan when everything is going well – when the hometown crowd believes in us, to borrow a metaphor from today’s scripture reading.
		4. But our best plans don’t always hold up in real life.
		5. We have to be ready to adapt, to relinquish the sham of control we try to convince ourselves scorekeeping yields.
			1. Boom!
			2. Jesus was punched in the face.
			3. His homecoming was not a festive parade, a triumphant trouncing of the opposition on his home turf, or the crowning of him as homecoming king.
			4. His homecoming was a “here’s your hat, what’s your hurry” dismissal of who he is and the sufficient grace he comes to share.
		6. Rather than throw a 2-year-old’s temper tantrum, Jesus adapted gracefully and imaginatively.
	3. Jesus called the disciples together, so he could send them out two-by-two – just like the animals on Noah’s Ark - with two directives.
		1. One was a gift, the other a command.
	4. The first thing Jesus gave the two-by-two disciples – and us as modern-day disciples – is authority over unclean spirits.
		1. Our Gospel writer, Mark, emphasizes that this authority Jesus gives to the disciples is the same authority God gives Jesus.
		2. But what does Jesus mean by an unclean spirit?
			1. Consider the Greek word for unclean, akathairo, which means something that isn’t pruned.
				1. An unclean spirit is a spirit without pruning.
				2. This is the same Greek word used in the passage we read after Easter from John 15 where Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches.
				3. Jesus goes on to tell us, “God prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it might bear more.”
			2. Jesus is telling the disciples - and us - in our Mark text, “shine God’s grace on people thereby helping them get rid of the dead branches preventing them from being God’s children.”
	5. The second directive Jesus commanded the two-by-two disciples – and us as modern-day disciples – is to adapt to the circumstances we face.
		1. We are to be adaptively authentic.
		2. Jesus tells the disciples to take nothing but a staff.
			1. No bread, bag, money, or extra tunic.
			2. Disciples in every day and age must be prepared to be flexible and willing to shape the delivery of God’s Good News so the audience can hear and understand it.
				1. Disciples must accept that one-size-fits-all ministry is both arrogant and ineffective.
		3. And disciples must be willing to shake the dust off their feet if they aren’t accepted – just like Jesus had done by leaving Nazareth.
			1. Others are waiting for the Gospel.
7. There is a curious connection between the way we humans think and the way we bond.
	1. When we tend to keep score or frame life’s issues in black and white, either/or, on-and-off alternatives, we tend to lack resiliency.
		1. This kind of thinking yields bonds that are binds chafing our souls.
	2. On the other hand, when we don’t keep score and are not afraid of ambiguity, then the repertoire of our relational responses is broadened.
		1. That broadening in turn enriches the alternatives in our style of thinking.
		2. Our bonds become bands connecting us harmoniously to one another, to God and to the universe.
	3. I wonder what Sir Paul McCartney was thinking during his homecoming.
		1. Was he merely reveling in the crowds who came to see him?
		2. Or was he perhaps thinking of his classmate and collaborator, another hometown boy who urged us in song to
			1. Imagine no possessions
			I wonder if you can
			No need for greed or hunger
			A brotherhood of man
			Imagine all the people sharing all the world
			2. You may say I'm a dreamer
			But I'm not the only one
			I hope someday you'll join us
			And the world will live as one
8. May our imaginations aid our acceptance of God’s grace being sufficient.
	1. May we stop keeping score.
	2. May we be so confident of God’s abundance we eagerly give away the Homecoming crown and embrace the greater good God has in mind for each one of us.
	3. Now that’s a homecoming worth having!
		1. Boom!
1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqyymhg04fg> Accessed 7/1/18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)