

*Community Pres. Church July 9, 2006 by Rev. William Huntley*

**As most of you know Helen and I have been away for all of June, arriving back at midnight on July 4 to LAX. My own experience of July 4<sup>th</sup> was watching airplanes land and take off from Dulles all day until my late flight left for LA. There was no evidence of anything like a celebration at the airport, and only when landing at LAX, when the night sky, clear and 67 degrees revealed one burst of a rockets red glare as if shooting up toward the airplane somewhere in Culver city. But the sermon itself was in preparation for the month we were away, as I thought about what I might say today. In some sense it was in play for even longer, for where we go, if not a Presbyterian conference place like Sylvia, Joe, Donna and David are attending right now in the Louisville, but it has become a restful and reconstructing setting for both of us. So far only Heather has joined us there, as in two years ago. I know that neither Mark nor Paul stopped off at the exact location where we spent most of our time. But I did feel at least the cloud of Christian witnesses in Athens, especially that of Paul, as again this week as I read Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians ( II Cor. 12:2-10) as was assigned by the lexionery to consider on this July date. (By the way Corinth has become a suburb of Athens today on a fast**

**commuter train of about 45 minutes. But for Paul's time it was a long hike perhaps of two days).**

**At any rate I felt the ache of Paul this week the "thorn in his flesh" which he wrote about to his troubled and troublesome Corinthian congregation in this letter. Paul does not have an experience of entering into heaven or paradise in this letter, or elsewhere, but he noted that 14 years ago (one commentary says that could have been in 44 A. D. or earlier in the ministry of Paul that he met a man who could speak from outside our human experience as if he was speaking from heaven. That impressed Paul so much that he could recall it 14 years before. Paul cannot attempt to preach as if from heaven, and instead he talks about the thorn in his flesh. Was it some back pain, or leg pain or leg pain, from all his walking? Was it some eye problem, for elsewhere he notes he is writing a paragraph in a letter with his own hands in large letters? More recently one interpreter suggested it was a problem with his libido because he has to write, and preach, with great care because of his own sexual temptations and to warn others of such temptations more than once.. But such a comment makes me feel in touch with Paul. The words for "thorn in the flesh" in Greek (*skolops ti sarki*) can mean "stake" which would carry a suggestion of a large item penetrating his flesh. By the way I can report that in**

**Greece I always study Greek. Often I try to read Paul without a translation, which is difficult. This year, I did tried a new approach. I bought a children's book on the level of a 6-10 year old in a toy shop with some help from a sales girl, who told me she had a book about ancient Athens entitled Neiro Kal-----**

**By a man named William Shakespeare. It was not the play by Shakespeare, the Midsummer Night's Dream but an adaptation of the story which I showed to the children just now.**

**I am only about half way through with my own translation back into English from the children's story, I should add.**

**From Greece we went to Britain at first to visit some friends we met in Greece and they took us to church two weeks ago where we heard a sermon on Mark 4, of Jesus in the boat and following the same lexionery we use Mark 5 where Jesus is touched by the woman was also followed. And no doubt this morning they heard some 8 hours ago a sermon on Mark 6. We also got to addend an evensong in Chester Cathedral on the following Tuesday where no sermon was given, just a reading from Psalms, one from Judges, and one from a gospel was read. But we were seated in the choir, which was about the size of our church here, the choir section. The Cathedral is probably**

**50 times the size of this church, but so few people were in attendance that rainy night that the choir was 24 and the congregation was 20 in size. One could tell the choir from the congregation by noting that only the choir had robes and they all sang at full volume as if to fill the entire sanctuary. It was a moving experience for I could sing as loud as I wanted and did not have to worry about being off key for the choir overwhelmed my voice, and somehow uplifted it into their own. I wondered at that moment if that what heaven would be like, singing as loud or as softly as one wishes and being part of something so wonderful, so otherworldly it would all be uplifted to God as if not only inspired but transformed in Go's presence.**

**But now, at last you may be thinking, comes our text for today. There are really two different stories here. There is the pericope at the beginning of the chapter (vs. 1-6) when Jesus makes an appearance back in his hometown of Nazareth and some of the people recognize him and ask "Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us. Then they get offended.**

**It is interesting to hear of Jesus whole family, Joseph his father having died, and of his 4 brothers, he has disciples by the same names, familiar Jewish names of that Jesus**

**time and our own, and Mark's mention of Jesus sisters, whose names he did not recorded**

**What offended the folk in Nazareth? Was it the tone? Was it the fact that they knew Jesus as a boy and as a carpenter and could not accept him in any other role and hence could not be open to the newness of the teaching which Jesus brought to his fellow townsmen. Mark notes that Jesus did lay his hand on a few sick people and healed them, but "no mighty work " could be done there because of their unbelief, and indeed Jesus was surprised, he marveled (ethaumasen dia tin apistian autoon)at their unbelief." Matthew (13:59)editing Mark's earlier work changed the "could" ((ouk edunato ekei poiisai oudemian dunamin) or "did not have power" simply "he did not do many mighty works there." Luke (4:16-24)in the story of the saying about no prophet is acceptable in his own country... connects this with Jesus standing up in the Nazareth synagogue with the reading from the book of Isaiah 61:1=1 "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor ...he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. In so doing, Luke suggests that the people who rejected Jesus in his home town were doing so because of what he read from Isaiah and applied to himself. Mark did not**

**know that, or chose not to make the reason so clear for the rejection**

**Then comes the line that the whole story moves to encompass, that a “prophet is now without honor, except in his own country.” That line had come to have great significance by the time Mark wrote the Gospel some thirty years after the event took place in 60 something AD, for by then many Jews had rejected the teachings of Jesus and Mark and Paul were traveling through the Roman Empire, Mark perhaps writing for the church that had been established in Rome, to suggest that the Romans, Jews and Gentiles alike were more likely to accept the teachings of Jesus than were the people in his own home town.**

**In the second story for today as recorded by Mark, Jesus “gathered his disciples and sends them out two by two. “ We remember that Jesus had called his disciples right after the baptism (Mark 1:16ff) and they had been on the road with him for some time, in the boat as we heard two weeks ago, present at the scene of the woman reaching out and touching Jesus as in the story for last week. But where had they been while Jesus was in Nazareth? Had he taken them there with him? Had the townsfolk become offended that Jesus brought his 12 hungry disciples in the town with him? Indeed Jesus told his disciples to take no**

**food with them, no extra change of clothing, just the staff and sandals and NOT two coats. Such a group coming into a town might have been the offence in the previous story.**

**He also told them to go into one house, and stay there until they leave the town. (That seems to me to suggest they should not spend their time moving from house to house, making or looking for better accommodations. Stay just there and then leave, but if anyone puts them out, then they were to shake the dust off, as a testimony against those who dismissed them.” I take that to mean a quiet condemnation and not a noisy utterance or curse.**

**The judgment comes later by God for those who reject the disciples of Jesus, and the judgment is compared to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Reflecting back to our adult study group back in May in which we pondered what was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, it would seem to be the lack of hospitality rather than a sexual preference which is being recalled by Jesus here.**

**Let us turn also to the Old Testament readings. We heard Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. There we have a Zion Psalm or a Pilgrimage Psalm which people sang as they went to Jerusalem the city where the kings assembled**

**Who are “ they” in (ps48:5) who were astounded and took to flight. Was it the conquerors who came to Jerusalem at the time of king Hezekiah who saved the city by building a good water supply for times of crisis ? One wonders what the connection might be with Mark 6. Certainly this is a psalm which Jesus knew and which he would have sung with his family in his early years and with his disciples later at the end of his life when he goes up to Zion to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. Maybe his family recited the psalm in Nazareth, but the tone of the two texts seems very different, at least to me. The Mark chapter is about those who reject being punished. The tone of the Psalm is one of triumph and trust in God. I wonder if we have a version of the psalm in our hymnbook. I do not connect it with any tune as psalm 23, 100, 148 etc.**

**Now for the 4<sup>th</sup> reading, from II Sam 5:1-5 and 9ff. There does seem to be some link with Psalm 48 for it is a story about David taking Jerusalem the stronghold of Zion who took it from the Jebusites and made it his capital. The story has a chronology that David reigned from Hebron for 7 and ½ years and then from Jerusalem he reigned overall Israel and Judah 33 years. Maybe it is written by the D Historian after the Psalm for there is no reason in the text that suggests it was not or was, for that matter, written by**

**David himself. He is one of the kings the author of the psalm would have had in mind, for he was the forefather of all the kings in Jerusalem all of whom claimed ancestry through the root of Jesse, i.e. of David's ancestry. Even Jesus in the lists of his ancestors in Matthew and Luke link him with David not as a king as the genealogy.**

### **Conclusion:**

**What do these 4 texts suggest for us in 2006?**

- 1. We can celebrate in the tone of the psalm a trust that God who established the monarchy of David in Jerusalem (II Sam) is our God for ever and ever...olam we olam....and he will be our guide forever.**
- 2. From Paul's letter we can determine that our God is a personal God who leads us in our work, our ministry, but it may not always be easy, he may be rough with us and he may even give us a "thorn in the flesh" to remind us that suffering can be an element in our discipleship.**
- 3. Finally from Mark's story of Jesus rejection in his hometown of Nazareth and elsewhere for the disciples who are sometimes put out of the places they were dwelling, they do so in good spirit, not cursing or giving the middle finger salute to those who reject them, but they like we are to believe that God has the power to punish wrong doing.....**