



Roanoke, Virginia

July 4, 2021

“A Rose from Concrete”

Mark 6:1-6

Rev. Benjamin S. Brannan

Each of the four gospels include a story of Jesus being rejected from his “hometown,” with each version of the story having their own unique details included or omitted—much like other stories the gospels share in common. What you must first come to know is that when all four gospels include a story, it must mean something, it must be important in shaping the early church, and the writers must have felt that the inclusion of such stories were vital to the whole of the gospel message. We continue looking into Mark’s gospel narrative, reading from Mark 6:1-6. Listen for God’s word to the church today.

¹He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²On 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! ³Is 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. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Two weeks ago, we held a four-night Evening VBS here in the sanctuary. The Rev. Andrew Whaley of Raleigh Court Presbyterian Church led us through an exploration of the leadership roles



in ancient Israel. These three roles are that of prophet, priest, and king. Andrew walked us through characteristics of each and how they interconnect and how each play a role in the ongoing vitality of life in community. We had a great four nights of discussion and dialogue. And I will tell you... we have some smart members here... smarter than those over at Raleigh Court... Andrew's words, not mine—but I would have to agree.

For those of you who were there, this will sound very familiar. But for those of you who were not there and have yet to watch the recordings online (which are available on the church's YouTube page)... here is a snippet of what Andrew Whaley taught. The three roles: king, priest, prophet.

The king is concerned with power, carrying out the use of secular power, to provide for the apparatus and architecture of justice in the land, and to provide order and security for the people. The kingly role is dynastic, carried on from one generation to the next, and is part of the establishment.

The priestly role is also dynastic, in ancient Israel the priests were descendants of Aaron, thus the priests are also part of the establishment. They have special uniforms that designate their role. The priests were set apart, they lived away from the rest of the people, as they carried out their work in the temple. Priests keep doing and maintaining the same rituals and festivals year after year, and they are concerned with *kaivos* time—the eternal time of God: the seasons, the festivals, helping people lift their vision from the present moment to the eternal moment, to a posture of trust in God's provision and care.

The king is dynastic and part of the establishment; the priest role is dynastic and part of the establishment as well. But what we all know, what Israel knew, what God knows, is that when you have an establishment that is dynastic, it is prone to corruption. So, the final leadership role is needed.

The prophet is an essential part of Israel's identity as well. The prophet is not dynastic—no one is a prophet cause their daddy was a prophet. A prophet is a charismatic leader, one who is raised up and driven by the Spirit. The prophet is not removed from the people like the kings or priests; the prophet comes from the people, with no uniform to set them apart. Unlike the priest, who is concerned with *kairos* time, the prophet is concerned with *chronos* time—the here and now moment—where is God's will being enacted or being hindered in the present. The prophet is concerned with fidelity to God in the physical actions of the nation.

Andrew continued and gave us his seven characteristics of the prophet:

1. Prophets don't relish the role.
2. Prophets denounce empty priestly ritual.



3. Prophets criticize idolatry of the king and of the people.
4. Prophets speak for the voiceless.
5. Prophets are poets and performers, not producers of policy.
6. Prophets are conversant with the kings—they have access.
7. And Prophets imagine the impossible.

From this description of the prophet, one might be able to see why being a prophet is hard and why prophets did not win the superlative of “most-liked” in ancient Israel.

When you think of prophets—then and now—who comes to mind? Do they fit these criteria and characteristics?

Martin Luther King Jr., Amos, Habakkuk. Otis Moss III, Lecrae, Rachel Held Evans, the Dalai Lama, Jeremiah, Elisha, Desmond Tutu, Katie Geneva Cannon, Valerie Kaur?

These are the names that come to my mind.

Prophets teach, prophets challenge, prophets push for something more for the people and from the people. Who are you thinking about?

Jesus calls himself a prophet in our passage for today.

Jesus just finished teaching through parables, he calmed a storm and questioned the disciples’ faith, exorcised a demon from a man, healed a woman from bleeding, and restored Jairus’ daughter back to life. He then heads home. Perhaps exhausted from all of this or exhilarated, trying to keep the momentum going, he goes to his hometown. He made his way into the synagogue and began to teach. As Luke’s gospel tells us, Jesus opened the scroll and read from Isaiah—

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

—and then points to himself as the fulfillment of such prophecy: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The people who heard him were amazed. In verse two we read questions



of awe, questions of astonishment: “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given to him, that he even does miracles!” The people are genuinely amazed. They saw the power and wisdom that Jesus possesses. They saw the miracles he is doing (or at least heard of them)—they are witnesses. . . . Then they remember that he is one of them, and there comes a shift in their response.

“Wait,” they say, “isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son? We know his family, and there seems to be nothing special there. Who does this guy think he is?”

From awe and amazement to questioning and disdain. They saw, they speculated, and then they stumbled. The people couldn’t understand that one of their own would be able to do such great things. Nothing good comes out of Nazareth; nothing special is born of us they think. From their perspective, as one from the people, Jesus certainly isn’t anything special—they know him and his family—to the people of Nazareth, he is just the illegitimate son of Mary.

We all have heard the phrase “familiarity breeds contempt”—the idea that the more we know of something or someone, the more we will find fault in them or in that thing and begin to lose respect.

Jesus is teaching and healing, and they were amazed. But then they recalled what they knew about him and where he was from, and this amazement turned to scornful contempt. It says in verse 3, “They took offense at him.” They were offended by who he said he was. They were offended by who he claimed to be. They took offense at him because they could not believe all of this to be true. Their familiarity with Jesus and his commonness (as one of them) caused them to take offense, and stumble, making it difficult for them to believe he was a great teacher, a powerful healer, much less the prophetic fulfillment and Messiah.

We have seen this in contemporary prophetic voices like the ones I mentioned earlier and perhaps the ones you were thinking about. One in particular comes to my mind, especially as we read of Jesus’ hometown rejection. Now, some of you may not refer to this guy as a contemporary prophet, or even think his message is prophetic at all. But remember, prophets speak for the voiceless, they are poets and performers, and, in the words of Walter Brueggemann, prophets criticize and energize. The contemporary prophet I am referring to is the great 1990’s artist Tupac Shakur. Tupac was the son of two Black Panthers, and he was an outspoken voice for social change. His love of poetry came before his fame from music, and many of his poems and songs point to the harsh conditions he and many in the black community were raised in, the discrimination the black community endures, and the violence and injustice the black community faces from each other and from the system. I will mention, however, not all of his songs are meant to incite the call for equality, some are demeaning and derogatory. But if you have not heard his song, “Changes,” I recommend it.



No other song and poem of Tupac's speaks to what Jesus endured that day in his hometown better than his album and title track, "The Rose that Grew from Concrete." The song is a poetic presentation of the life struggles that he and the black community had to live through and the miracle that was his escape. Tupac says, "You try and plant something in concrete... If it grows and the rose petals have scratches, you are not gon' say, 'Look at all those scratches on the rose that grew from concrete.' No! You gon' say, 'Wow! A rose grew from concrete!?!'" Tupac continues, "Same thing with me... I grew out of all this. Don't say, 'He did this.' Instead say, 'Wow! He grew out of that? He came out of that?'"^{1 2}

Tupac had a hope. A hope that we would see each other—see beyond the color of our skin, beyond the place we lived, beyond the concrete that holds us back—to see the rose that we all truly are. We all have grown from some sort of concrete in our lives. We have encountered resistance, push back, setbacks and even failures. Whether it is a diagnosis that changes us forever, or the labels put on us from past mistakes; or the idea that we cannot amount to anything, only living in the shadow of expectation and our environment. We all have endured the hard places of life that seem to forever keep us down, and for some it may even be rejection from our family. And we all have scratches on our petals; some are deep, some are still healing.

But I am here to remind you, that you are a rose. No matter the concrete you had to endure or the concrete you are currently facing, you are a rose. You are blooming despite your brokenness. You are beautiful in your brokenness. And by the grace of God, you are beloved as a bruised and broken rose.

The townspeople of Nazareth couldn't get past their contempt to see the joy that Jesus embodied. Jesus' own people saw him as a threat to their claim of power in this world. Yet Jesus possessed a different kind of power. Jesus possessed a power that was not limited in its capacity. Jesus possessed the power of love and compassion, which when given, it grows; when shared, it returns; when seen, it is imitated; when the power of love and compassion of Jesus Christ are made known, that power multiplies. And this power still healed. Christ still laid hands on those hurting, still offered peace and love and mercy in his hometown; he still created a space and invitation to believe and follow.

The townspeople looked at Jesus as a rose that grew from concrete: "Who does he think he is? He was born of us; he grew up here with us. Nobody amounts to anything from here." Tupac would reply, "You wouldn't ask why the rose that grew from concrete had damaged petals. On the contrary, we would celebrate its tenacity. We would love its will to reach the sun!"

May it be so. Amen.

¹ Tupac Shakur. *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*. Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster Inc. MTV Books, 1999.

² *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, Amaru & Interscope Records, 2000.

