

Jesu Juva

“Crossing the Line”

Text: Mark 6:1-13 (2 Corinthians 12:1-10)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was *supposed* to be a day that left everyone feeling good. Hugs and kisses from family. Handshakes and pats on the back from friends and former co-workers. Even admiration from those who perhaps hadn't known Him so well before, but had now heard of all that He had been doing. He was a well-respected teacher. He was doing mighty works. Word had gotten around, and they were proud – one of their own, doing great things. And so on that Sabbath the synagogue was probably unusually crowded, packed, in fact. The whole town coming out, to listen to Jesus preach. . . .

But Jesus didn't say what they expected Him to say. They were *astonished*, and not in a good way, at what He said. They began to say to one another, “*Who does this guy think He is? Where did He get these things? Why is He speaking like this?*” And so the day that began with such anticipation and promise, ended with the people mad, disappointed, and offended.

*So what did Jesus say? What did He say that was so offensive? We're not told here, but Mark tells us earlier what Jesus' message was as He went about preaching. He said: **The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.** Repent, because they are sinners. They've done what is wrong and not done what is good and right. They've spoken hurtfully, and their thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin. So repent, and believe that the One spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament, the One who would do the works of God, the One who would save them from those sins, is here. And not just “here” in a general sense, but here - sitting before them and speaking to them now. The kingdom of God is at hand for the King is at hand. *Repent of yourselves and believe in Me*, Jesus said.*

And they were offended.

Now, were they offended at who He claimed to be? That this man they knew as *the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon* claimed to be something more? Maybe. But they could have dismissed that and dismissed Him as a lunatic. But at least He would be *their* lunatic, especially if He did some of those mighty works *for them*. But what really stuck in their craw, what really offended them about Jesus, was not what He claimed about Himself, but what He claimed about them. Calling them sinners. Calling them to repentance. He could have talked about Himself all He wanted, but once

He started talking about *them*, and accusing *them* - that's offensive; that's crossing the line!

And that's generally the way it is today, isn't it? Jesus, and the church, and religion are all okay with most folks. They may think we're goofy, even crazy. And we can have a church and we can meet all we want and people won't much care. In fact, they may even *like* some of the things the church does for the community in feeding and clothing the poor and other service projects. And some folks may even come and join a church for that. As long as we leave their lives alone. As long as we don't cross the line. As long as we don't speak against what they believe or like or think, and the latest thing society says is good and right and normal. But do that . . . and things start to get a little nasty . . .

But it's not just "them." *It's you too.* And if Jesus were here today, He'd offend you too. 'Cause He wouldn't let you get away with your sins. He wouldn't let you hear the Word of God here and then leave like nothing ever happened. He'd confront you about why your Bible isn't cracked all week, or if you did crack it, why you can't remember what you read 5 minutes later. He'd confront you about why you're too ashamed of Him to speak about Him to your friends and neighbors. He'd ask why you haven't lifted a finger to reach out to those folks who haven't been in church for a while. Or why you do the least, not the most, you can do. He'd condemn you for the grudges you hold and your lack of forgiveness. He'd confront you with how uncaring and hurtful your words and actions are, especially to your family members. He'd ask why you continue to do what you know is wrong and then act like it doesn't even matter. He'd ask why you continue to be more concerned about your own name and reputation than His. *And that's just for starters.* Then He'd get specific . . . and name all your false gods . . . all those things you fear, love, and trust more than Him.

Because the truth is: Jesus isn't the offensive one, **you are.** We've just become nose-blind to our own stench, and heart-hard to our own sin. And it's we who've crossed the line: from God to satan, from holiness to sin, from life to death, from heaven to hell.

Which is what makes Jesus so amazing. Every other religion or belief in this world will deny the line, move the line, or demand that you cross back over that line yourself. **But Jesus is the only God to cross that line to carry us back Himself.** Think of the worst, foulest smelling place you can imagine on this earth, and what Jesus did in coming to us is infinitely greater than that . . . when God became man. But cross over He did. To take all your offense, all your stench, all your sin, all your death, all your hell, upon Himself. 'Cause when He did that, He took you upon Himself, that in His dying and rising, you might too. You were going to die anyway, but you had no chance for life. Zero. Nada. Nil. Zilch. Bupkus. So Jesus came to take you back to life. To take you back from sin and death to life. A new life, in Him, in His cross, in His forgiveness.

And so He washes you clean and robes you in with His righteousness. We call it baptism. And then He continues to wash the grime of your daily life of sin off your feet. We call that absolution. And then He feeds you with the bread of life. We call that His Body and Blood, His Supper, His communion. It's all a foretaste of the other side of the line, which we had before satan convinced us that the grass was greener on the other side and we jumped not into a pasture but a cesspool.

So as Jesus said: *repent*. Stop denying the line, moving the line, or trying to cross back over that line yourself. You can't. Only Jesus can. So repent in your weakness and be strong in Him. That's what St. Paul said: ***For when I am weak, then I am strong***. Now we don't like being weak, that's why we don't like telling those we've hurt or offended we're sorry and ask for forgiveness. But you are never so strong than when you do; than when you give up on yourself and your pride and your strength, and rely on Jesus.

And that's why we pray for this in the Lord's Prayer. That was the focus in our Vacation Bible School this past week - the Lord's Prayer and what it means. And so Jesus taught us to pray: **Thy Kingdom come. *What does this mean? The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. . . .*** Or in other words, God's Kingdom comes when God *crosses the line* and come to us. The Kingdom of God is at hand in the Son sent by the Father, and the Spirit who binds us to the Son. *Thy Kingdom come*. Come to us here, we pray, because we cannot come to you.

And come His Kingdom does. What happened in that synagogue in Nazareth that day is what takes place here every Sunday, wherever we speak the Word of God to each other, and whenever we forgive one another. The Kingdom of God comes to us in His Word of life.

And that's why this weekend, while our nation is celebrating Independence Day, we'll watch our fireworks and sing patriotic songs, but not in here. The Kingdom in here is different. We give thanks for our nation, yes, and all the blessings God has so graciously bestowed upon it. But God doesn't care about nations. Those are divisions we have made. He uses nations and works and blesses through them, but the only anthem that is sung in heaven isn't a *national* one, but a *heavenly* one. And we'll sing that one again here today, that *greater* one, as the Kingdom of God crosses the line and comes to us. *Holy, holy, holy*, we'll sing with the angels. For we are now, and will be in the end, not one nation under God, but one people in Christ Jesus, in His Kingdom. So sing it loud, even if our nation and world don't want to hear that anthem, and proclaim that the Holy One is here. Here with His gifts of forgiveness and life. Here for you and me and all people, until we go home, in Him. Until He crosses us over, to a joyous homecoming in heaven.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.