Text: Mark 6:1-13

**Introduction**

I try not to bring in too much theology jargon, because all that tends to do is make me sound like a schmuck. But today I do want to bring in a term. The Scandal of Particularity. The cutesy way of defining it is to say “how odd of God to choose the Jews.” Biblically, people usually point at the rather dramatic change from Genesis 11 – the Tower of Babel, to Genesis 12 – the call of Abram. God in Genesis 1-11 appears to be working in a universal way: A universal flood, a complete scrambling of languages. But then God starts choosing individuals: Abram, not Lot; Isaac not Ismael; Jacob, not Easau. The Scandal of Particularity. Scandal in the old fashioned sense of the word. Not a salacious opportunity for celebrity, but a giving of offense, or a cause for doubt. Particularity is simply choosing or favoritism. The offense of a God who chooses.

The Scandal of Particularity is also tied into the fact of a personal God. The Deist conception of God – a watchmaker – doesn’t have this because that God is not person. He created, made the rules that apply to everyone, and just lets it run. Pagan theist conceptions might fall afoul – Athena had her favorites. But there were plenty to go around: from Artemis of the Ephesians to the simple household gods. The God of the Philosophers – the unmoved mover – would be excused from that because nothing that mere humans could do or so could move that one. Anything good or bad we might experience wasn’t because of Divine favoritism, but simple the turnings of fortune. One moment a king and the next a pauper. Wait and the wheel will turn again.

But the God of the Bible: Father, Son and Spirit is particular, is personal. And because personal, is knowable. But this God has chosen to be known in specific ways.

**Text**

Jesus returning to his hometown is about as specific as it gets. Jesus of Nazareth. Tiny Nazareth, so small that if it were not for Jesus, we wouldn’t know of its existence. Some small village in Galilee in the North of what we call Israel surrounded by the cities called the Decapolis. And I appreciate how Luke tells the story because I think he gives us a missing ingredient. Although it is not absolutely necessary.

Jesus has been in Capernaum and the towns and villages around the Sea of Galilee. He has been doing what the Galilean ministry is known for: healings and exorcisms; signs and wonders. Culminating with the raising of Jairus’ daughter. Why her, and not any of the other dead children of the day? Jesus seems to be pretty indiscriminate with the healings at this point. If you are brought to him, he heals. Although that might simply bring up the question, why that one particular place and one particular season, and not here?

The way that Mark tells the story when that cycle of visits is complete, Jesus goes back to his hometown. And he’s got his disciples in train. And on the Sabbath he goes to the synagogue. Going to worship was a regular pattern of Jesus. And he’s given the pulpit. But it is not really about what he says. Luke records a little more of that. According to Luke Jesus basically announces that he is the messiah, that it is the year of the Lord’s favor, and that Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in their hearing. But the way Mark tells it, the message is really extraneous. It is the person himself. “Where did this man get these things? What is this wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?” We know this guy. He lived and grew up amongst us. There was nothing dramatically special about him. He did carpentry, maybe a sly insinuation about his parentage – the Son of Mary. He’s got brothers that we can name – James and Joses and Judas and Simon. And sisters. (If you are Roman Catholic or the perpetual virginity of Mary is important, good luck with this passage. Cousins is a stretch.) This Jesus is very particular. “And they took offense at him.”

In Mark the offense is simply that God is particular. It can’t be this one. Luke adds the detail that Jesus intuits that they want to see the signs and wonders he’s been doing. And the people of Nazareth think they are owed them. But Jesus refuses to do it. He goes so far as to say “were there not widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, but he was sent only to the widow of Zarephath.”

That might be a hint at the strange passage, “he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.”

**Christology/The Name**

The signs and wonders pointed at who was amongst them – the Christ. And what powers were his – life and death. But they had already made their decisions about Jesus. This Jesus – whose brothers and sisters and childhood we know – could not be the Christ. Doing wonders would just cause more offense. More scandal. Why them and not us? Why not everyone? Doing wonders would not open any to belief. “He marveled because of their unbelief.” And it was simply an unbelief based in the particularity of the person.

Maybe it’s because I’m an egghead. But I don’t think it is just that. The church as a whole has a problem with this. Fighting over names and pronouns. We prefer to use the generic God. Everyone can supply their own conception there. But our creed uses Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We prefer to use Christ – the title. Peter did to. Until he learned that his conception of the Christ was off. The creed confesses Jesus who is the Christ. And it gets very particular. Jesus, the one born of the virgin Mary. Jesus, crucified under Pontius Pilate. Jesus, who sits at the right hand of the Father. When we talk about the Spirit, we prefer some forward looking Star Wars force. We don’t like the specificity of the Spirit who spoke by the prophets. We don’t prefer the specificity of the Spirit who works through the one holy catholic and apostolic church. The Spirit who is given in Baptism. The Spirit who forgives sins. The Spirit whose purpose is the sanctify and keep us unto the resurrection of the dead.

God has revealed himself to us. He has given us his name. The 2nd commandment tells us that we shouldn’t misuse the name of the LORD your God. Yet our preference for the generic over the Specific is exactly that misuse. We hope that we can use the generic to curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie or deceive by the name and never be called out on it. But the specific personal God that has revealed himself to us will not be used in those ways. Jesus has given us his name to call upon it in every trouble. To pray, praise and give thanks. To have a specific personal relation with him. If we can get past the scandal. If the Jesus as he is does not offend us.

The Jesus that comes to us has all kinds of particularity. He is the Jewish messiah. He might not give us the signs and wonders we think we deserve. He chooses to do all kinds of things we might never understand. But this Jesus is also the only one who has taken away our sin. He is the only one who is the Lord of life and death. He is the only one who profligately has sent out the Spirit and proclaimed the love of the Father for all who believe. We all can be healed of the only disease that really matters – sin. We all can have our great enemy – Satan – driven out. But only by this name – Jesus. And only by that cross.

He was crucified…for us….

**Moral**

The Scandal of Particularity is real. I see it all the time. We can’t accept something about how God has chosen to reveal himself. We can’t except the prophetic from the Word has come to us. We get offended at how God chooses and isn’t fair – at least by our human standards.

But this does not stop the mission of Jesus. He sends them out to any who might listen. If they don’t shake off the dust and move on. But his sheep hear his voice. And even those who go away offended know. They know a prophet has been among them.

When you feel the offense climbing. Ask why? Examine yourself. Are you offended because of the form? Because the Christ doesn’t look as you want him to look? Because he’s not doing what you demand? Because of what He is asking you to do?

How are any of those things invitation to know the God we have – Jesus – better?

**Eschatological**

Jesus would often end his teachings with the phrase “to those who have ears, let them hear.”

We may think we want the signs and wonders. We may think we want the generic god that we make up ourselves. But what we need is the Word of the only God who is. A very specific one. The One who has called you into his kingdom.

Call upon Jesus. Lean into the particular…the real that is set before you in your daily bread. For that is the narrow way.