



# Massanutten

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**No Home for the Kingdom**  
A Sermon Preached by John P. Leggett

July 5, 2009  
*14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)*

**Mark 6:1-13**

No matter how long it's been since you read or heard the story of Little Red Riding Hood, I suspect you still remember the story. Little Red Riding Hood is heading off on a journey—to see her grandmother—and the storyteller describes her to us as she makes her way to her grandmother's house by skipping through the forest with her basket in hand.

It's a great story. And one of the things that makes it a great story—that keeps us turning the pages or which pushes us to the edge of our seats when listening to it—is a piece of information which the narrator—the one telling us the story—gives us. We listeners are told that the big, bad wolf goes to the grandmother's house, ties her up, puts on her house coat and night cap, and crawls into the grandmother's bed to wait for Little Red Riding Hood to show up.

Meanwhile, having no knowledge of any of this, Little Red Riding Hood keeps skipping through the forest. She is totally unaware of what's waiting for her down the road. We know what's coming; she doesn't. The storyteller has let us in on something which Little Red Riding Hood will have to figure out on her own as the story unfolds.

Do you remember the first time you heard the story? There's that classic exchange between Little Red Riding Hood and who she thinks is her grandmother—but that we know is the wolf—“My, what big eyes you have, grandmother!” “All the better to see you with, my dear.”

Every time Little Red Riding Hood speaks, we listeners wait for her to discover what we already know. “Of course, she has big eyes!” we cry. “It's not your grandmother—it's the wolf!”

It is that hunger within us that keeps turning the pages. By giving us information that the girl in the story doesn't have, the storyteller creates an amazing sense of anticipation—of hunger. We want her to discover what we already know.

Mark does the same thing in his gospel. Verse 1 sounds like a starter's pistol as Mark gives us some knowledge that those in the gospel will have to discover on their own. We are told in the very first verse who Jesus is: He is the Christ, the Son of God. That question of Jesus—who is this—is the driving force in Mark's Gospel. It is that question which keeps us turning the pages as we wait for someone in the story to discover what Mark has already told us—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

When Jesus walks into the synagogue and begins to teach, and everyone stands around after the service saying, “Boy, that guy was great! Where'd he come from? He taught with such authority—unlike any we know. Who is this,” we already know: He's the Christ, the Son of God. We know; they don't.

And in the next chapter, when Jesus heals the paralytic dropped down through the

hole in the roof, and all of those who witnessed it say, “We’ve seen nothing like this! Who is this guy?” you and I already know because Mark told us: “He’s the Christ, the Son of God.” We know; they don’t.

And later still when Jesus is traveling by boat with his disciples and a storm comes up so that the boat is tossed about by the waves, and the disciples go down to wake Jesus up and he comes out and stills the storm, even as the disciples ask, “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” we already know: “He’s the Christ, the Son of God.” We know; they don’t.

By this point in Mark’s Gospel—chapter 6—a lot of things have happened, and we’ve heard the question a bunch of times. And, as typically happens, some that we expect to figure it out—the insiders—don’t get it. But, some of those we think should be clueless, show remarkable faith. It doesn’t take long to figure out that some reject Jesus, and others follow, but all wonder, Who is this?

Finally, when word of all the deeds of power that Jesus has been doing fills the morning papers, Jesus heads for home. And he goes to his hometown synagogue and begins to preach, we readers think, “Finally, someone’s going to get it. He’s home. They know him. If anyone can answer the question about Jesus—who is this guy—it’s got to be those closest to him, those who have known him the longest and the best.

But even they don’t get it right. At least not the whole story. The people in Nazareth thought they knew the answer. After all, by the time Jesus arrived back in his hometown synagogue and began to teach the people, he had done some amazing deeds of power. There was no denying that Jesus was a local boy who had done well, and when he came home, folks wanted to hear what he had to say. After all, they knew him. Or at least they thought they did.

But they knew him in a very limited way. Who is this? It’s Mary and Joseph’s son, isn’t it? We know him. He’s the carpenter from down the street. They are right of course, but according to Mark, they are still miles away from the truth about him: He is the Christ, the Son of God.

In fact, it was their absolute certainty about their answers that kept them from seeing the larger truth. They simply couldn’t believe that someone they knew, someone that they could define in simple categories like neighbor or son or by profession could be used in such a powerful way by God. And there was no way they could get to the depths of his identity as the Christ, the Son of God, as long as they were trapped by these lesser truths. In fact, they were downright offended that Jesus was saying and doing the things he was because it didn’t fit into the cubby holes they had confined him in.

And Jesus knew that. Don’t you think that’s why he finally told them that “a prophet is not without honor—except in their hometown”? And Mark even goes as far as to tell us that Jesus could do no deed of power there, and that he was amazed at their unbelief.

It makes me wonder: So why isn’t a prophet accepted at home?

Well, it could be because the people know the prophet too well. You know, you tend to lose your prophetic fervor when you make your way to the pulpit through a group of folks who gleefully tell you, “Remember, I used to change your diapers when you were

a kid.” And of course your pronouncements about keeping the commandments of the Lord smash against the litany of times when you didn’t—a litany the neighbors are more than willing to share with you.

When I was struggling with the call to ministry, it was always the ones who knew me the best who questioned it the most. “You’re going to be a preacher? What’s the church coming to?”

Yes, when the folks to whom you are preaching know you inside and out, it’s easier for them to dismiss your words, because they remember the times you dismissed them yourself.

Of course, it could be that a prophet’s not accepted at home because the prophet knows the people too well. It’s been said that the greatest challenge to prophetic preaching is the prophet’s love for the people. The prophet simply doesn’t want to say anything that would hurt the hearer.

Yes, prophets aren’t accepted at home because the people know them too well. And it’s also true that a prophet’s not accepted because of their knowledge of and love for the people. But there seems to be something more to it than that.

Do you think a prophet isn’t accepted at home because no single hometown is large enough to hold the kingdom of God? It’s the practical truth of what we will affirm together in our affirmation of faith—that God’s reality far exceeds all our words can say. In other words, because we don’t fully comprehend who God is or how God works, because God exceeds our ability to express his identity, any attempt to contain God within the narrow boundaries of any hometown or family or congregation or denomination or theological perspective or ideology will fail miserably. In the strictest sense, there is no home for the kingdom.

I think that’s why Mark was sure to tell us that Jesus left home and went into the villages, where he taught and did deeds of power. And I think that’s why Jesus sent out his disciples—and continues to send us out—to continue ministry in his name.

Next Sunday, we will gather around the font to commission our Senior High mission team to go do work in North Carolina. In what they do and what they say, they will be bearing witness that God is at work in this world, bringing people to fullness of life.

Our task is to refrain from ever thinking that we’ve got God and Jesus figured out completely, and to continue to go in Jesus’ name to witness in word and in deed to who he really is: He is the Christ, the Son of God. And there is life in his name.