

## Sermon for Sunday, July 8, 2018 – Mark 6:1-13

When I first read this morning's gospel - the opening verses of Mark 6 – I heard two very distinct and disconnected tales. But now I see them as one seamless story of hospitality and love.

In the first story, Jesus returned to his hometown synagogue to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal. But it didn't work out. His old friends all threw shade on him. They did not believe that the guy they had known since he was a baby could have wisdom in his words and power in his hands. They did not extend hospitality. So he could not help.

In the second story, Mark described how Jesus sent his disciples out – two by two - to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal. He said they were ready for their journey just as they were, with no extra tunic, no bread, no bag, no money; no planning for their safety and security. Their order was to trust God's hospitality for everything they needed.

Now, that first story contains a familiar quote by Jesus, which also appears in Matthew and Luke. Jesus said: "Prophets are not without honor, except in their own hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."

The common understanding is that Jesus's friends and family tried to sabotage his work because they were seething with resentment, asking questions like: "Who does that Jesus think he is, anyway?" As much as we might enjoy the irony of that proposed rhetorical question – Who does Jesus think he is? – I really believe there was something else going on there. Maybe they just wanted him to be safe.

On this Sunday following July Fourth celebrations, I think of one of our American patriots, Georgia Congressman John Lewis. Before he became a lion of the U.S. House of representatives, before he was a brave voice for forgotten Americans, and before he was a hero of the Civil Rights movement: John Lewis was a beloved young son of share croppers Eddie and Willie Mae Lewis, as well as a beloved brother.

Growing up, John and his eight siblings could not use their "whites only" library in Pike County, Alabama. But that didn't stop him from learning. As a brave 17-year-old in 1957, John tried to integrate the nearby all-white Troy State College. His application was ignored, and his parents begged him not to press the matter because they were afraid he would be killed. That was the climate of his childhood. So he completed his education at American Baptist College and Fisk University, both predominantly African-American schools.

John Lewis loved his parents and he did not want them to worry.

But ultimately, he couldn't stay away from civil rights activism because he believed so strongly in human equality and also in the philosophy of non-violence.

John Lewis was changing the notion of what it means to be a citizen, that equality needs to apply to everybody. He accepted that his safety and security were just an illusion. But his parents wanted to believe in that illusion because they did not want to see him get hurt. And, as we know, he did get hurt. Our family and our hometown friends are the very first people in our lives who love us. So, if they see us being very risky and brave, they can only think of our safety.

Jesus's family and friends knew that he was being seen as a religious and political threat. His earthly safety and security were at stake.

But Jesus knew that he had been put on this earth to change the notion of what it means to be loved and forgiven and saved.

God's love is the only safety and security. Our human attempts are just an illusion.

So, that's why I see the second half of this morning's reading as a logical conclusion to the first. Jesus loved his disciples as his brothers.

But, when he sent those two-by-two disciples out among strangers to proclaim God's love and to heal, he knew that an extra tunic or a loaf of bread or some coins would not make them any safer.

He wanted them to experience radical dependence so that the people they encountered could learn to extend radical love and hospitality.

All of us have occasions in our lives when we are dependent and we are receiving, as well as occasions when we are empowered and we are giving.

In a world filled with danger and fear, we are now the messengers of God's healing love! It's our journey. It is now up to us to show what it means to be loved and forgiven and saved. And we are ready for the journey just the way we are.