

## PREACHED IN THE PARISH OF ST JAMES, MONCTON

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 4, 2021

They went out and preached that all should repent.

I suppose I have to admit that it was nearly forty years ago when I was leading the parish in the upper Miramichi. I received a phone call from a photography company which would arrange to take pictures of all the families in the parish community. Probably you've been involved in one of these projects. Individual families would be welcome to buy the portraits for themselves, and a profile magazine of the parish would be prepared and given away—pictures of all the families in the parish. The lady who called promised me that the profile would help people in the parish know each other better. I saw the point, but I said to her, I wish there was a way you could help the people in this parish realize that they actually don't know each other quite as well as they think they do.

That's the rub of a small community, isn't it? People know about each other. And they're awfully glad to tell you what they know. If you're lucky, in a small community, you'll find yourself on the inside of a group, a clique, and know that you're in with 'us' because you're not one of 'them.' This is true of small communities, and, as we know, parishes, but it is also true of cities—especially if there are railway tracks—or a river--- that can mark the boundaries between us and them. And national and international politics these days are more and more about identity—who we are by defining who they are—colour of skin, religion, ideology, anything will serve to make an 'us' and a 'them.'

It's not only in today's gospel that our Lord lives this universal human experience. There are several ways in which Jesus is deemed not to

belong to little ol Nazareth: they know the family—the Mother, his brothers and sisters. We have to wonder what it means that Joseph is not mentioned—must be a story there to be whispered about. ‘Carpenter’ is a grand word for what perhaps should be translated only labourer. Every male Jew was entitled to speak in turn in the synagogue, but impressive as what Jesus said was, it was diluted by who they thought he was—or perhaps, who they knew he was not.

The incident ends with our Lord recognizing that he was not going to be accepted on the ordinary terms of this world. He and his disciples would need to go out, on perpetual journeys, with none of the security that families and communities put their faith in: food and money. You remember a few weeks ago, when Jesus was down on the waterfront in Capernaum, his mother and family came to rescue him from this mad cap wandering and bring him ‘home.’ Jesus response was to those around him: everyone who does God’s will wherever they happen to be, is his mother and sisters and brothers. And the truth is this going forth, wandering, has been a large part of the history of Jesus’ mission to the whole world: Christ’s missionaries have wandered, but, as it turns out, among wandering peoples: migration is one of the defining characteristics of the western world—a long steady westward movement--our ancestors all immigrants down through the centuries, each new wave pushing the ones before them to the west, until we over ran this present continent and pushed the people who were here before us into reserervations: for us to be the ‘we’, they became the ‘them.’. And cities like Moncton are continually renewed by the movement of people down from the north and east of the province as well as refugees from throughout the world. The internal migration patterns in the United States are absolutely fascinating, an anti-clockwise movement of those from the south up the seaboard looking for opportunity, and those who have achieved moving back into warmer parts in the south. Most of our

parishes, especially in the suburbs, are made up of these migrations. In fact the word Parish implies a pilgrimage, a stop along the way.

It is in this never-ending movement we hear the Word of God to us—or we don't. We can refuse. I read over this past year somewhere that Jesus had two main messages as he attempted to open our eyes to God's very presence in our lives: reconciliation and healing. The two are parts of the same coin. To be healthy, whole, is to be at peace with those around us, at peace with ourselves, to be able to accept and to forgive. To be at enmity is to be dis-eased, un healthy, un whole. Life's business, wherever it is that we find ourselves, is to seek reconciliation and well being and know that wherever we are, whomever we're with, God is offering us life and joy. Here and now. Surely it is no surprize that the voices that help us hear this promise of God to us are from outside of us: it is the new comers, the suffering, and perhaps above all the children, who show us the promise of god's kingdom: it is in Mark's gospel that Jesus is asked who is the greatest, who belongs the most, and he takes a little child and sets him in the middle of them as the greatest sign of God's kingdom. At the end of Mark's gospel, when the city and the nation have done everything they can to push Jesus out—the church handing him over the state—the state crucifying him outside the city, the women who come to the tomb, including his mother who never stopped believing in him, come to the tomb. There the young man, another stranger, tells them, "He is not here, he has gone ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him." Galilee being his home province. There the very ones who first excluded him, who could not see what was right in front of their eyes, would see him. So he has gone ahead to the Upper Miramichi---there you will see him. He has gone ahead to Moncton—there you will see him.

So today is a challenge to see our here and now. Jesus message is that ALL should repent, we ALL need to see him here. We need to see that our families, our neighbours, our children, and perhaps most difficult of

all, the strangers among us, hold this promise of reconciliation and health.  
The kingdom of God, to quote our Lord one final time, is here---