

If someone says, “Crabs in a bucket.” The first image that comes to mind is this, an amazing bucket of food. But before you can get to dinner or lunch you need live # crabs in a bucket. Looking at this picture you might think couldn’t those crabs just climb out of there. Wild animals, even ones with exoskeletons have an instinct to get free, but the crabs don’t; if one crab starts to climb out the rest pull it back in.

The people of Nazareth, Jesus hometown, heard Jesus preach and were astounded saying, “How does a carpenter’s son get this ability?” and they took offense. Why did they take offense? How did Jesus offend them? Jesus is healing and giving life; this should be good news. Maybe Jesus is breaking the mold of their preconceived notions of who they are and who they can be. Maybe they believe a person’s identity is summed up by who their parents and siblings are and there is no room to go beyond that. They don’t want Jesus to escape the limits of their mutual enclosure. Like crabs in a barrel, if one crab starts to climb out the others pull it back in.

This analogy of crabs in a barrel makes sense but a barrel isn’t a crabs natural habitat. The barrel is a captivity and in a similar way the people of Jesus’ hometown were held captive by the Roman oppressive rule; they weren’t in their natural habitat either. Maybe the people of Nazareth do not want to risk association with Jesus. He has drawn large crowds, he is causing a stir—he is tipping the barrel. For the people of Nazareth escape from the barrel is too painful a thought. In the midst of Roman oppression toying with the notion of freedom is more than they can bare—hope is too painful.

They trust the sure and certain Roman retaliation against the rest of the crabs if anyone is tipping the barrel or climbing out and they pull Jesus down.

With this in mind let’s look at the story about John the Baptist. The people and indeed Herod, wonder, maybe even believe, that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected. For the first century Jew resurrection was part of a larger picture of what God was going to do in the world. Resurrection was connected to hope and hope is one of the most dangerous things oppressed people can have. A hopeful people can know the worst that tyrants can do and the deep darkness in the world and at the same time know that the true God has the answer—Jesus; God breaking into the human existence in a way that upsets the status quo—the bucket. Those who are benefiting most from the current system stood to lose all that it provided. Good news for the crabs, bad news for the barrel. Herod is a crab, he is a puppet king for Rome, and the amenities that Rome provides Herod make barrel living comfortable, but his comfort rests in keeping the other crabs peacefully in the barrel.

The theme verse of the whole Gospel of Mark or the verse that we can use as a lens to look at all of the gospel is 1:15— “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” This word repent is *metanoia*. When my kids do something they shouldn’t and then say they’re sorry, I remind them how “sorry” is *metanoia* which means to turn the other way, to change; but the exact literal translation is a changed mind. You can get me to change my actions but

changing my mind is harder. What God is about isn't just actions but our mind; a new mind, a changed outlook.

The whole point of the good news is busting the barrel.

There are three stories that we read this morning from the Gospel of Mark: Jesus in his hometown, Jesus sending the twelve disciples and the death of John the Baptist. At Nazareth Jesus is rejected. In the third story the people, and even Herod, are claiming that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead, but indeed this too is a story of rejection—if you do what John was doing, changing people's minds, you lose your head. What's in store for Jesus?

We have three stories and the bookends are rejection of the good news, rejection of God and in the middle is the story sending the twelve disciples to heal and proclaim the good news. In the midst of rejection- God continues. In the midst violence and opposition, God persists and not with an explanation of the Good News but with renewed witness and reaching out. God acts.

As we listen to these three stories, in particular the story of John the baptist we ask "What's in store for Jesus?" Resurrection. Hope for all people. Our lives can feel like rejection of the Kingdom of God is all around: that justice for all and peace in every nation; that all go to bed with a full belly and have clean water to drink; that foreigners receive welcome and love would put an end to war—the Kingdom of God! The Kingdom of God can seem like a child's dream. What was it that Jesus said? "To have faith like a child."

We know the story of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection. We have hope because Jesus lives. When darkness surrounds, we know that light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

So what do we do? We do what happens over and over again in scripture, what Jesus did in today's readings and Jesus continues to do today; when surrounded by rejection Jesus sends out his disciples, you and me, to **live** the Good News to heal the sick and feed the hungry. Our work in all of our lives—home, work, community and congregation—is to bring about the Kingdom of God. The hope that lives in us, because Jesus lives, makes real all those things that seem like a child's dream.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, we ask that we might have faith like a child. Amen.