

## **What if the Kingdom of God is like a Post-It Note?**

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**Preached by the Rev. Mary Keenan, at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Austin, TX**

I really like stories about “unexpected outcomes” and “unanticipated benefits.” You can see these kinds of things in families - like when a rained-out picnic turns into the best conversation you ever had with your kid - or in meetings when you go off the agenda and brainstorm a novel solution to a problem.

One of my all time favorite stories of an unexpected outcome is from the worlds of business and science. It is the story of the Post-It Note.

Back in the late 60s, a guy named Spencer Silver, who was a researcher at 3M Corporation, was trying to develop a strong adhesive. Something tougher than anything the company had produced before. In the process, however, he made something that was not very strong at all. In fact, this adhesive stuck so lightly, you could peel it off a surface without defacing it in any way. And then re-stick it. For years, while he still worked to create a strong glue, he also tried to figure out how to use the one that was not so strong. It was a puzzle.

At the same time, another 3M scientist called Art Fry had a more personal problem to solve. Every week when he practiced with his church choir, he'd mark his hymnal with scraps of paper so he could easily find the right pages on Sunday. But those scraps of paper kept falling out.

These two scientists put their heads together and created something new - a scrap of paper that wouldn't fall out, that was removable and moveable, that stuck just enough, but not too much. In the process, they wrote messages on these adhesive papers and - surprise! - they found a new way to communicate. By the late 70s these handy notes were on the market.

I love this story in part because I love Post-It Notes and can't imagine life without them. But I mostly love this story because it illustrates the importance of being open to the unexpected. Something that could have been dismissed as not good enough was instead envisioned as full of possibilities.

What we see in the Gospel story for today - and in Mark's gospel generally - is exactly that. Some people are open to the unexpected and see in Jesus a savior, a miracle worker, a new way for us to experience relationship with God and each other.

And other people are open only to what they expect - they see in Jesus a kid that grew up down the street, who is no more or less like any of them, through whom they can't see beyond what they already know about life, and God, and each other.

Now, before Jesus went back home, he wandered in the towns around Galilee teaching and healing and casting out demons. People he encountered didn't know him, but many were able to recognize in him something unexpected - the power of God. Demons recognized it - they begged him to leave them alone, but obeyed him all the same. Fishermen and tax collectors, busy at their jobs, recognized something in him - they left their work to find out more. And people who were sick recognized the possibility of healing in Jesus.

Yet, when Jesus goes home these miracles hit a road block. His hometown crowd can't reconcile the kid they saw growing up with what he is doing now.

(I do think Mark gives us a funny detail when he writes that Jesus "could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. As if that's nothing!")

Still, the hometown crowd gets exactly what they expect from Jesus: nothing. They were expecting Super Glue and Jesus gave them a Post-It Note. They couldn't see the potential.

There seems to be a connection between recognizing who Jesus is and being able to experience the healing and fellowship he brings.

Why? Why is it that Jesus can't just foist miracles on people? Why doesn't he heal a skeptic and say, "I told you so!"

In fact, he does the opposite. Over and over again, when Jesus heals someone he tells them, "Your faith has healed you." Not "my divinity has healed you" but "your faith."

Whatever healing, teaching, or liberating Jesus brings us, it is not for show. What Jesus brings us is a new way to be with God, to be with each other. Faith requires our participation. It means we have to be open to the unexpected and then join in.

Jesus is not just revealing who he is in these stories - the Messiah, the Son of God. He is revealing who we can be when we join him.

We see evidence of this right after Jesus and his friends leave his hometown. He sends his disciples out in pairs to do the very work they'd seen him doing - they are to preach repentance, cast out demons, cure the sick. And they do! They have joined Jesus' mission of announcing the Reign of God, of showing a new way to be in community with each other.

Together they are inviting people to engage with God in a new and unexpected way -

- By seeing strength in the weak and fitness in the sick
- By revealing the holy in those who are trapped in evil
- By trusting fishermen and tax collectors and prostitutes to show other people how the Kingdom of God works

If you are expecting things to happen the way they always have, well, you might get nothing. Yet if you are open to something new, you might get everything.

This is very good news for us. It means not only that the Kingdom of God is here, it means we can be part of it. Not only that, but Jesus empowers us to share it with any who have open minds and hearts.

The challenge is that very often we resist this good news because we can't see beyond our expectations. Even if we know this story inside and out - we can still get trapped inside our own assumptions about how God relates to us and to other people. We need help, healing, forgiving, but sometimes we can only accept it on our own terms.

Like the hometown folks, we might think we already know what to expect from Jesus. We think we know the whole story because we've heard it so many times. Oh, we believe Jesus is the Son of God. Yet, do we still let our faith surprise us? Are we able to accept that the Kingdom of God is not what we think it is or will be?

Friends, there is not one of us here whose expectations are as big as the Kingdom of God. It will always be more than we can imagine - and possibly stranger. It will involve people who seem out of place there, miracles that are audacious and surprising. It will be as unexpected for us as it was for the first disciples.

What Jesus hopes for us, what Jesus invites us into, is a relationship with him and with each other that is beyond our expectations. All it requires of us is the willingness and openness to see it. Even if it comes in everyday events and everyday people. Or unbelievable events and peculiar people.

Like those who were healed because of their faith and those who left what they were doing to follow Jesus, we will only experience of the Kingdom of God if we are open to the unexpected. The lack of faith among Jesus' hometown people doesn't come from NOT knowing him. It comes from thinking they know him fully. They know him too well for that. Too well to accept anything they haven't experienced before.

This is the challenge for those of us who call ourselves Christians, who already know Jesus - that we allow ourselves to still be surprised by him. That we acknowledge the fullness of God's love is not something that will ever NOT surprise us. There will always be something about God's love that can still take us by surprise.

Because sometimes, when you are expecting super glue, you will get a Post-It Note. And it might just change your life!