

The Carnival is Coming; It's the 4th of July, and the Kingdom of God...

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Mark 6:1-13, 2 Corinthians 12:2-12

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When I was a kid, our community celebration was always over the fourth of July. Several weeks before the 4th ever arrived, posters like the ones we have for All Schools Day would go up all over town. They were in store windows, they were stapled to telephone poles, they were given to all the churches, they were displayed at all public buildings including the library and the swimming pool (where all the kids in town went every day).

We would begin, as children, to save our allowance so that we could go on a few rides, (my favorite was always the Tilt-a-Whirl) and get some cotton candy. We would then walk over to the park and meet our folks, and other family members for a huge fireworks display. The Borchart's, our neighbors and best family friends, would usually go together and we would lay out a blanket, bring a cooler of treats which consisted of kool aide not soda pop and different kinds of homemade cookies, and plenty of bug spray and we would watch the fireworks when it turned dark. The whole town came out to the carnival and fireworks. The day had begun of course, with the annual 4th of July parade in the morning as well. The streets would be lined with people, and back then they threw candy. Floats, marching bands, and military marchers and the flag. I was taught that whenever the flag went by you stopped whatever you were doing, put your right hand over your heart and stood still at attention until it had passed by. It was the 4th of July! At the end of the parade a fire engine would come and the siren would blow signaling the end of the parade. It was the town's summer celebration every year that I grew up enjoying.

In the text for this morning, Jesus essentially is sending out His disciples as the posters to be put in all of the nearby towns indicating that the Carnival was coming and soon it would be the 4th of July (the Kingdom of God). I'm not trying to be flip or sacrilegious by saying the Carnival was coming to town. But imagine, Jesus the miracle worker shows up to town and unbelievable things happen. Word is traveling fast! People are being taught with authority, they are being healed of diseases, they are raised from the dead and things like that can't help but spread. Closest thing to a Carnival back then I

suppose as it must have generated a lot of anticipation. When Jesus arrived there was expectation, joy, fun, amazement, happiness, and certainly the belief that the long promised Kingdom of God was soon to arrive. As a matter of fact, that was the message!

The disciples going out 2 by 2 are essentially the posters being put up before the big event. The message was Repent, for Jesus is soon to arrive and you don't want to be caught off guard. Now is the time to get ready. Be ready to respond with faith because it's really true and He really can make a difference. The disciples healed some by anointing with oil, they cast out some demons which would have been impressive and they did it because they had faith and they were welcomed into people's homes as they came to deliver the good news that the Kingdom of God was at hand. They were eye witnesses!

The text for this morning not only tells us about the Carnival that was coming to all the nearby towns, but it also tells us that the center of operations was Jesus home town of Nazareth where we are told Jesus could do very little by way of Carnival acts... healing, curing, throwing out demons and it doesn't say Jesus refused, but rather listen to what the text says:

Mk 6:4 Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." Mk 6:5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. Mk 6:6 And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Ever wondered what it might be that truly amazes God? It may be not our faith that amazes but rather our lack of faith in light of all the blessings we have enjoyed that does. Remember, last week I said, search the scriptures and you will always see that Jesus responded (always) to the faith of others whenever He did any of His miracles. He chided His own disciples much of the time for their continued lack of faith especially because they were always had front seats whenever the show came to town.

I believe that today America is much like Jesus home town. Listening to the news coming to work this morning on NPR, Greece is in the news. Austerity measures are on the table and the prime minister has threatened to resign if the people vote yes. All of

the countries in the Eurozone are moving towards difficulty as Greece's loan can no longer be paid back.

Tunisia is also having a difficult time. The NPR reporter said, it's a difficult time to be experimenting with freedom. I have the name Esther Joshua pinned to my computer monitor in my office. On April 14th it was exactly one year that the 300 young girls were kidnapped in Nigeria. To date, she and 217 others are still missing.

This weekend we have celebrated the 4th of July and in celebrating we have been celebrating, more than anything else our freedom - Freedom to choose, freedom to live without fear, freedom to make a living and keep some of what we make. With all of the changes that are taking place, America is still the absolute best place to be living today, bar none! Still, I believe it is becoming more and more just like Jesus home town where little of any Spiritual value can be seen or take place because we have had it for so long and have taken so much for granted. Isn't this just still the same old Jesus that has always been around for the last 200 years?

We have sung and stated, God bless America. I believe it would be better to say, "America needs to begin to bless God once again" but I fear that day has come and gone. For Jesus it always has been and always will be all about faith and the coming Kingdom of God and that's what we are considering on this celebration day, a day to celebrate communion and the weekend celebrating the 4th of July. The message has never changed. The message is still repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand, and perhaps it may be closer today than we can possibly imagine.

If we're looking closely we may still see the posters being put up all over the place! Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near. May it be so... Amen.