

Lent Homily 3/10/2026 (All Saints); Mark 6: 1-13

*In the name of God the Creator, the Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Amen*

### **The Messianic Mission: Perseverance and Love Against All Odds**

Mark's gospel is a fast-moving narrative of escalating conflict for Jesus and his messianic mission. He professes this counter-cultural kingdom of God as a new development in the history of Israel. His mission claims a new understanding of religion as being inseparable from the social, political, and economic aspects of life. In essence the gospel narrative is the "kingdom preaching" of Jesus versus the social and political opposition it creates. His mission threatens the powerful, and will face one conflict after another. His mission will require perseverance in the face of powerful forces against him. By this time in the 6th chapter that we just read Jesus has been baptized, has proclaimed the coming Kingdom of God, saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near...." He has called his disciples. He has healed many, has tamed the wind and the water—the power of creation itself—while crossing the sea. He has broken all kinds of religious laws, including healing on the Sabbath and eating with sinners. He has also raised the suspicion and growing opposition of the Jewish religious leaders and their Roman imperial overlords, who are beginning to see him as a dangerous insurrectionist, a threat to their comfortable way of life. Jesus is on his way. The messianic mission is taking off, but with stiff resistance. In the reading today he has returned to his home Nazareth, I am sure hoping for a nice reception. He preaches in the synagogue and those who hear him are astounded by his wisdom and his deeds of power. And yet they take offense at him. "Where did he get all this?" they ask. "Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary?" This is not a friendly welcome-home reception. It's more like "Who do you think you are? How dare you?" Jesus responds: "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." Even his own family and friends have rejected him, turned on him. Yes, his mission will be a battle. And so, as is

typical of Mark's gospel, he quickly moves on. The next story is about Jesus sending out his disciples on their own, his commissioning of the twelve he has chosen to extend his ministry. Jesus gives them specific instructions about what they can take and what they can wear. He also tells them how to respond to the people they encounter. He warns them that they too may face rejection, may not be welcomed, that some will refuse to hear them. When that happens they are to "shake off the dust that is on your feet" and then continue on to the next place—to persevere, just as he did when rejected in Nazareth. These are basic organizing techniques, important for understanding Jesus as the organizer of a movement, a counter-cultural movement, indeed what will become a global movement to usher in the Kingdom of God he talks about and models. And it works, at least for a while. Everything seems to be going well. The messianic mission moves on, but in the very next scene we see the gruesome murder of John the Baptist by King Herod Antipas. And we are reminded once again, as we learned from Jesus's hometown rejection, that the countercultural ways of God's reign are rarely welcome. We hear of John's arrest, and of that bizarre episode of Herod's wife and her daughter, dancing before Herod and pleasing him so much that he offered her anything she wanted, and how, at her mother's urging, the daughter asked Herod for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. And so, John is beheaded, and his disciples take his body and bury it. What Mark is showing us is a horrible demonstration of how the ruling class, which often assumes the mantle of leadership and the heights of civility, can act with insanity, cruelty, and impunity.

And so Mark's gospel goes on. Jesus's messianic mission continues. It must be regenerated despite the obstacles. He and his mission perseveres through one conflict after another, even conflict with his disciples, until at the end of course Jesus is crucified. And yet the story does not end in the tomb. Before his death Jesus tells his disciples: "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." (Mark 14:28)

I recently read a book by Brian McLaren called Life After Doom. It is a pretty gloomy book about the deteriorating health of our home Earth. McLaren is a pastor, an author, theologian, and activist with a special interest in how the changing climate is threatening the health, even the survival of the Earth and everything living on it. I bring this up this evening, not to focus on the ongoing abuse of our home Earth and the changing climate, but because of what the author McLaren says about perseverance, and how similar his message is to the one Jesus gives his disciples as he commissions them and sends them out into the world. McLaren says that our perseverance is not tied to outcome, but rather that it is tied to love. Our hope is sustained not by the possibility of success of our efforts, but rather by our love for continuing to do what we know is the right thing. As he puts it “even if we lose hope for a good outcome, we need not lose hope of being good people, as we are able: courageous, wise, kind, loving.” There is a name for this way of living. It is called virtue ethics, in essence meaning that we live and act according to the virtue of our calling. In our Christian tradition it is rooted in Jesus’s teaching of the foundational overriding importance of love. Love is why we continue on when all hope seems gone, when we can’t see the way forward, when the world we live in seems to thrive on division, hatred, war, and death. Love is why we persevere when the opposition is strong, and the odds against us great. And where do we find this love? It is the love of the Christ within each of us. It is because of love that Jesus’s messianic mission continues on, through our actions as we answer that call, a mission still alive and active in the world today.