

We Got This

Psalm 48
Mark 6:1-13

We shall call her “Jane Doe”. In 2021 she became the first woman to become a U.S. Navy Seal. They call Seals “incursion and extraction operatives.” Put into English, that means they work behind enemy lines. They sneak in, do whatever their mission dictates, and sneak back out again. Every Tom Clancy novel I have ever read—and I believe I have read all of them—includes Seals or people like them. Jane Doe completed the twenty-seven week training, a thing only thirty-five percent of the male candidates have done. And these guys are already the cream of the crop. A few of the “features” of that training. Candidates must sit still in the ocean off San Diego for two hours. You may not know this, but the water temperature at San Diego averages sixty-eight degrees, conditions which can induce hypothermia in far less than two hours. Seal candidates must swim two miles in those same waters without touching bottom or any other support. They must be able to do one hundred sit-ups, twenty pull ups and fifty push ups. In less than three minutes. They must master “signal languages”, methods of secret communications. Jane Doe is tougher than every person in this room.

While the government never divulges the names of Seals—or Green Berets or any other of the special forces soldiers—the Seals most all get tattoos with a simple

anchor image on their upper right arms. When they go to a bar frequented by other service personnel who can see those tattoos they never have to buy themselves a drink. Jane Doe got questioned quite closely when servicemen saw her tattoo. They did not believe she was a Seal. But then the legend of Jane Doe made its way around and her superiors had to tell her to stop getting her picture taken with guys who had bought her a beer. Her anonymity was key to her mission.

Would you rather try to complete Seal training or go out into the world preaching that Jesus is the Savior? When Jesus sent his disciples out, two by two, to have “authority over the unclean spirits” and evangelize in his name, what do you suppose they thought? They felt? After all, this episode did not start in a strong place. Jesus and his followers had come his “own country”. Undoubtedly, many people there could remember him as an infant, wearing what infants wear and doing what infants do. We spent last Thursday with our one year-old granddaughter. She needed changing several times. This is entirely normal. Its application to our passage from the Gospel of Mark is that people in Nazareth and Galilee had to struggle to take Jesus seriously. The text reads as though they thought he was some kind of sorcerer. “Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is this not the carpenter, son of Joseph and Mary...?”

Well, no, while Mary was his mother, Joseph was not his father. According to the Gospels, the Holy Spirit had somehow caused Mary’s pregnancy. He is the Son of God, not of Joseph. His wisdom and mighty works came from the divine, not the

human. But the people in his own territory understandably could not believe this. So it was in this context that Jesus sent out his disciples. Disbelief, resistance. Mark tells us he carried on, going “among the villages teaching.” Then he sends his disciples out into the same dubious climate. Last Thursday, the 4th of July, in the City of Philadelphia, home of Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, a large group of Palestinians demonstrated against American support for Israel in its war with Hamas. Philadelphia authorities chose not to intervene—except to threaten anybody who wanted to express a contrary view with arrest.

How has it come to this? Do we not have a first amendment to our constitution, guaranteeing free speech? Let the Palestinian supporters hold their protest. Let those who oppose them counter-protest. Let anybody behaving violently get arrested. We have arrived at a place where we try to prevent certain opinions—and to demonize anybody with whom we disagree. We expect them to pay a price for their opinions—but not that we must pay for our own, even if many disagree with us. Again, when Jesus' disciples went out at his bidding, they certainly faced the crowds' confusion at best, and their opposition at worst. Yet they did it. And they met with success. Jesus' teaching was a new teaching. Many of the Jews disagreed with it. Yet the disciples apparently circulated freely, sharing it. That must have been frightening and exhilarating at the same time.

We do not know everything Jesus ever said. We must fill in some gaps with assumptions. There is a saying among police detectives: “Assumptions kill.” So we

need to take care that we assume as accurately as we can. According to the written Gospels Jesus displayed godly powers. But he did not speak openly about his identity. He called himself the “Son of Man”. Others called him the “Son of God.” A few years after his crucifixion the Apostles Paul and James would write about him as the Messiah. I believe that he was—and is—all that. Yet each one of us must make the decision about what we believe his identity to be. As Jesus himself asked his disciples, “Who do *you* say that I am?”

I say that Jesus is the Son of God, God embodied, who calls us to go out into the world proclaiming his divinity. His power. His love. His grace. I say Jesus has a ministry in mind for each one of us. He has gifted us with powers of our own. Some of us here today have received the compassion to visit and even to feed others. Some of us here today have received the ability to teach. Some of us here today have received the calling to attend to the great social issues of our times, to income and housing and opportunity. Many other gifts exist. Our job is to discover how Jesus has empowered us individually and to do what we can. Last week I learned that a man I know here in Terre Haute graduated from Seymour high school with a woman Linda and I have known since we lived there in the '90s. Both of them sing beautifully. Both of them direct church choirs. Both of them lead congregations to praise God in much the way our Psalm from today directs. They have gifts. You may not feel you do. Your gifts may not be so obviously impressive. But we all have powers given us by God. Use yours.