I’d like to begin my sermon by inviting us into the Gospel of Mark just a few pages back from where we entered in today. Word of Jesus’ healing powers has gotten out, and no matter where he and the disciples go, massive crowds seem to come after them.

places of deep

Just prior to our story today, the crowds swarmed Jesus so badly by the lake that the disciples had to get him a boat from which to teach so he, and they, wouldn’t get crushed.

When he wanted to appoint the 12 apostles who would be sent out in his name to heal and proclaim, he had to retreat to the top of a mountain and call them to him.

In our passage today, they return to his home, and the crowds remain so large that neither he nor the disciples can eat.

The translation we heard today then says that as the crowd began wondering if Jesus was “out of his mind,”Jesus’ family came to restrain him. Scholars actually think that the word “family” here is a bit of a mis-translation. Most think that it was his apostles who came out to restrain him.

His apostles, just named on the mountain above, now watching this massive crowd calling Jesus into question, perhaps beginning to wonder, themselves, if Jesus is not necessarily possessed by God, but by mental illness.

As the crowd gets bigger and bigger, closing in, becoming more challenging than supportive, the disciples go to Jesus with the intent to physically restrain him, perhaps to protect him, or perhaps…to protect themselves.

There is something in this scene, in the tension of the pressing crowd and the likely fear that the choice the disciples have made is unthinking, even laughable, that I can really relate to, and I wonder if some of you can, too.

So often, we seem to be stretched in every direction--our jobs want more and more of us—available by email and text at every hour—our families calling all the while for their time with us while we fend off our bosses and clients…the demands can get so great there isn’t even time to eat.

And those things we may feel most passionate about doing are often the very things that we second-guess. It is as if our own feelings of passion for something—or the ability of something to unlock those places of

joy, righteous anger, immense hope, immediately make that something suspect.

They threaten our ability to be controlled, pleasant, calm, perfect. To be what others expect of us.

PAUSE.

As I was talking with my dad this week about this passage, he recounted the following story a colleague of his used to tell:

There was a gentleman who went into a bargain basement store to buy a suit. He tried on one that he liked in terms of style and color. He spoke to a clerk and said, “I like this suit, but the sleeves on the jacket are too long.” The clerk responded, “Just hunch over your shoulders a bit and that will pull the sleeves up to the right length.” The customer added, “The legs of the trousers are too long.” The clerk answered, “Just bend your knees as you walk, and that will bring the trousers up to the correct length.” The gentleman decided to wear his new suit home.

As he walked out of the store with his crouched shoulders and bent knees, two women who were entering the store noticed him. One said to the other, “look at that poor deformed gentleman,” and the other replied, “Yes, but doesn’t he have a nice-looking suit on.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Oh, how many times have I tried on this suit!! How many times have you?—Most of us are wearing a whole bunch of images other people have of us, or ones we have of ourselves, that just don’t fit, but look so nice on the rack. That fancy suit that says

you’re the smartest?

or maybe the most creative?

the friendliest?

the hardest

worker?

the most devoted

father or mother?

Each of these suits holds out a vision of perfection, by some or other measure.

Where are you crippled by the suits people have put on you? Or, those you have put on yourself?

PAUSE.

Those suits look fantastic on the hangar, but why do we hobble along in them, when they clearly don’t fit? In our Gospel passage today, Jesus, humanity *perfected*, clearly is not wearing that high-end suit of *perfection*. He is so passionate, so unrestrained, so vulnerable to the movement of God in him that people think he’s out of his mind, maybe even possessed!

He’s certainly *not* the picture of the totally put-together, high-achiever so many of us feel pressure to be. He sees that suit on the hangar—his apostles want to try to wrestle him into it to save his own life and perhaps theirs. But, he wants nothing to do with it.

In fact, for Jesus, humanity *perfected* is not about *perfection* at all. Humanity perfected is about being as open as possible to the Holy Spirit.

As he takes on the scribes in the crowd who accuse him of being possessed by the devil, he says "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."

If we don’t honor the sacred call of the Spirit within us, but instead put on that crippling suit that just doesn’t fit, we become so unable to live in the Spirit that we can’t access that forgiveness that is ever-waiting for us. Not because God denies us that forgiveness, but because our arms are too restrained to reach for it—our minds too preoccupied to feel the relief it promises, and the joy that follows.

Being willing to follow our passions—to become vulnerable in our joy, our well-considered anger, our hope—and put aside predictability and safety is to be the perfected human. Restraining ourselves so that we can fit into the suit of perfection, or the suit that promises we will be “the best…the *most* whatever it is” is to restrain the redemptive work of Christ within each of us, and to drown out God’s call.

Being perfected in Christ, by the Spirit, is, as Chris reminded us on Pentecost just two weeks ago, often unsettling…it is often emotion-filled, passion-filled…it is always unpredictable.

Yet, it is also the only way for us to be fully alive—fully ourselves—

humanity, perfected.

Sometime this week, in a moment or two of quiet, maybe in the car, or with your coffee in the early morning—Recall our Gospel passage from today and spend time with it. Begin by putting yourself in the disciples’ shoes. Who or what are you trying to restrain? Who or what threatens you, and why?

Perhaps the next day, put yourself in Jesus’ shoes. Who, or what, is trying to restrain you? What do you want to say, do, or be that just doesn’t seem to “fit” with what you or others are comfortable with?

God has called you—perhaps to do something particular, perhaps to live in the world with a certain perspective. May you have the courage to live into that call, unrestrained, dancing with the Spirit.

AMEN.

1. Merle R. Jordan, *Reclaiming Your Story: Family History and Spiritual Growth*, p.50. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)