I have already found that I have had to use the phrases, “Who do you think you are?” and “You’re getting too big for your britches” with my 4 year old. In case you don’t know, “britches” are pants. Maybe it’s the age, but there are times when she starts telling me or another adult in the house what to do. Or the times I’m trying to correct her on her behavior, and she’ll tell me to shush. When a young child starts acting out of place, we will question their authority…because they don’t have any…and let them know they are out of line.

In today’s gospel passage, the locals are having this same reaction to Jesus, who is definitely older than 4. This week, we once again have a 2-part story before us. They aren’t really intertwined like the healing stories of last week. But they certainly are inter-related. In the first story, Jesus is back in his hometown teaching in the synagogue and some of the people start questioning who he thinks he is doing all of this authoritative teaching and healing. Apparently, Jesus doesn’t get the reception of the home-town boy who comes back to play for the local professional baseball team. Apparently, the hometown crowd just can’t get over who they know him to be…the carpenter, son of Mary, brother of James, Joses, Judas, Simon, oh and some sisters.

This may be a little more than the saying, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Notice that the first thing mentioned about Jesus is, “the carpenter.” In this case, they are kinda viewing Jesus like my 4 year old…he doesn’t belong in a position of authority. Remember that society in Jesus day was stratified and that included professions. A carpenter cannot just decide to become a religious leader. To become a religious leader, one must be able to demonstrate the ability to study and memorize the Jewish law and be chosen by a rabbi to do so. If one is working as a carpenter, they obviously don’t have what it takes to be a religious leader. So who did Jesus think he was, trying to be a religious leader when he was actually just a carpenter?

We may hear this story and wonder how these people could be so dismissive or even hostile toward Jesus? It is easy to judge them. But let’s remember that they are wrestling with a new way of things. Carpenters just don’t become religious leaders. In their society, it never happens. They were entrenched in the stratified society, in which everyone had a place and if anyone functioned out of place, they brought shame to themselves and their families.

We walk around every day with assumptions of how things should and shouldn’t be. And when things are out of order in our opinion, we may speak up about it as well. But our assumptions are very much informed by the ways that human beings see things, not necessarily the way God sees things. In this way, we may face similar struggles to the people in Jesus day…the struggle to see the “new” thing that God, through Christ, is doing in our midst.

The interesting thing about these 2 stories being back-to-back is that, while Jesus may not be able to do much in his hometown due to their attitude, he goes ahead and launches his ministry into the surrounding villages by sending his 12 followers. What makes this interesting to me in the first place is that, if the people in his village were scandalized that HE was doing all this teaching and healing as a supposed “carpenter,” how would they feel about the fishermen, the tax collector, these other common men going out and doing the same? But it doesn’t matter how they feel about it, Jesus and his followers go to share the good news of the kingdom come near, so that many in the surrounding villages were anointed, and cured and healed.

There will be times when we get into a huff or a tizzy or whatever you want to call it because things in the church or related to our communal faith don’t seem to be going the way we want or expect them to go. But as long as people are hearing the good news, experiencing healing and welcome through Christ, the kingdom is gonna keep on doing its thing until we catch on or catch up. The kingdom that Jesus brings into this world breaks down all of the stratifications that we put in place and wipes away the shame of operating outside of those systems. No one is better than anyone else based on who we are, where we came from, or what we do for a living. The kingdom welcomes all, heals all, frees all, serves all and calls all of us to share that important message.

Therefore, all ya’ll are called, just like the 12, to share the good news of this kingdom, this family into which all are invited. It doesn’t matter what you do as your “day job”…as a baptized child of God, you are equipped to do the work of sharing the good news of the kingdom. You probably won’t do it door-to-door, as I think we probably picture the disciples doing. But we all have friends, neighbors, co-workers, even strangers that we encounter every day to whom we may offer a glimpse of the kingdom in an act of kindness or a word of encouragement. Or we may find ourselves drawn to a particular organized effort to work for the well-being of people who are struggling or who are being treated unjustly.

The cool thing about this kingdom of our God is that it is for common folk. Common folk are welcomed, are reconciled with God, are forgiven and healed and loved through this kingdom. It is also meaningful, purposeful work that God, through Christ, have given us common folk to do. We open ourselves up to God working through us, and we see the amazing things God can do of which we got to be a part. We also see God at work through our siblings in Christ. We may even see God at work through people we would never expect.

So forget about the stratification and hierarchies that humanity puts in place. They have no place in the kingdom that Christ has brought among us. This kingdom, with all its healing and mercy and love is for all of humanity. And each and every one of you has a part to play in sharing the good news of God’s kingdom. I am not the designated evangelist. There is something even more powerful about knowing that the mailperson and the teacher and the attorney and the construction worker and the food truck chef are integral proclaimers of the kingdom of God among us. And the message that God wants to be with all of us, work with all of us is a pretty amazing message as well. Amen.