

August 12, 2012

An Unwelcome Hometown Visit

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

PRAYER

Mark 6: 1-13

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?” ³ Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph,^[a] Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

⁴ Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Do you remember some of the not so bright things you did when you were a kid? I mean the things that you did in public; the things that you were known for in the community and that perhaps even gave you a not so good reputation. Such things like breaking windows, causing disturbances in the neighborhood or maybe doing pranks even when it wasn’t April Fool’s Day.

The point is a childhood reputation is a hard thing to shake so that even as an adult, when you go back home, people will still whisper: “There’s _____ he or she was a real challenge as a teenager – because everyone can remember all the negative incidents that you ever did but never the good and humanitarian deeds.

Without a doubt, any person returning home would love to be welcomed to their hometown with a billboard neon sign that says - WELCOME HOME – we’re glad you’re back!

As Mark tells us in our Scripture reading, Jesus is returning to his hometown. It’s Friday night and Jesus is having an old fashion halleluiah, praise the Lord camp meeting! Let me tell you, the service that night was jammed packed. There wasn’t room to park all the donkeys outside. The parking lot was full. There were so many people in the synagogue on that Sabbath that they ran out of bulletins. They put benches up in the center of the aisles. People squeezed their heads into the windows. No one wanted to miss the opportunity to hear a word from the “local rabbi who made good” on his return visit to his hometown.

They all began to whisper and get excited as Jesus came into the crowded service that night - and the worship service looked much like the one we having this morning. It began with singing of songs, prayer, community news and then Jesus read the Old Testament passage that revealed his core values and symbolized his entire ministry: Isaiah 61: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* (please take time to read the entire Isaiah 61)

Isaiah 61 is the chapter of hope. In this chapter, God promises an everlasting or new covenant between God and God’s people

This passage from Isaiah 61 clearly outlined the important values in Jesus' ministry. Jesus then closed the book. There was a very, very long silence, and he said: "These words are fulfilled in your hearing."

The people of God have been waiting for the Messiah to come, for the anointed one who will come at last to heal the broken-hearted and set the down-trodden free, to liberate the captives and to give sight to the blind. Our weary, weary world has been longing since forever for fulfillment -- "groaning," as St. Paul says [[Romans 8:22-23](#)], as it waits to be set free and to be made whole, suffering as it waits for an end to war and natural disaster, for the coming of peace, the flourishing of justice, the sounds of harmony and laughter.

Then he preached a sermon on that text and afterwards, "everyone spoke well of him and wondered at his gracious words." Others exclaimed, "Where did he get all of this!" And still another said, "Where did he get so wise?" What is this gift that he has been given? What's with these amazing things that are being done by his hands?"

But yet there were others who murmured and grumbled, "Isn't this the son of Joseph? Isn't this simply the carpenter's kid? He is just the common kid from Nazareth. You know, the kid who grazed our donkeys; who watered our oxen, who drew water from the well for us to drink. He is nothing but the carpenter's kid. There is nothing too special about him."

And pretty soon, according to the passage, "they took offense at him." Oh, the hometown folks were impressed, at the beginning but then resentment and jealousy reared its ugly head and they began to downplay his gifts - For a carpenter or one who works with his hands, he spoke very well. But how could this man who had grown up in their community, whose family was still there, could have attained such wisdom and insight.

In Samaria, they loved him! In Cana, he could turn water into wine. In Jerusalem, he taught the rabbis a thing or two. But in Nazareth, Jesus was just Jesus; the kid from the wood shop.

Some people in the synagogue were thinking: "He could do all those miracles there in Capernaum but he can't do any miracles here in Nazareth." And Jesus said, "A prophet is not accepted in his own home. A prophet is not accepted in his own home congregation. A prophet is not accepted in his own hometown. The reason that I don't do miracles here in Nazareth is because of your lack of faith.

Jesus never traveled more than 180 miles from home, but on this **Unwelcomed Home Town Visit** the people dismissed him. He couldn't even perform miracles; that's how weak and cynical their faith was. So Jesus left town with these words: "Prophets are not honored in their own hometowns and among their own families and even in their own houses." And he left. And scripture doesn't ever record him as returning to Nazareth again.

If the adage is true, that "familiarity breeds contempt" then Jesus was too familiar with the people of Nazareth to be effective in sharing his knowledge about God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Somebody else would have to tell the Nazarenes about salvation, and forgiveness and grace.

Tell me; have you ever tried to share your faith with people who know you well? The ones who have seen you in compromising situations or heard you gossip, or watched you do things that do not give glory and honor to God? If your reputation or actions do not follow after Jesus, how are others ever going to listen to you when you talk about matters of faith? This is a great argument for living righteous lives.

We are all sinful people and those who know us best have seen us at our worst. The fact is we need Christ because we are sinners. We share our stories of God's forgiveness because it is the very thing that has given us hope and joy. Our credibility comes not from our perfect living, but from God's gift of grace, and that's the story we tell. I was deep in sin but Jesus took me in – and his amazing grace and limitless mercy change me – I'm not the person I used to be.

You see, that's the beauty of the gospel; that we don't have to be specially qualified to receive it, and we don't have to be specially qualified to share it. We only have to be honest about who we are, and how much God loves us.

So, there's somebody today who is waiting for you to share your story. Someone waiting for you to say "You're probably wondering how a scoundrel like me can even go to church on Sunday's; let me tell you my story...." Thanks be to God I'm not the person I used to be and I am WELCOMED when I visit my hometown. Amen.