

Mark 6:1-6
Mount Olive—July 7, 2024

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, 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.

Dear fellow children of God:

On the southeast side of Springfield, Illinois off of I55 there is a power plant with this proud statement painted on the side: “Visit Mr. Lincoln’s Hometown: Springfield, Illinois.” If you travel about 700 miles to the south on I55 and about an hour east and visit Kiln, Mississippi, you will be greeted by this sign: “Home of Brett Favre.” This isn’t unusual—Babe Ruth, George Washington, Jimmy Carter and many others have signs in their hometowns proudly staking their claim as the birthplace of somebody famous.

From what we learn in our text this morning, 2000 years ago there was no sign outside of Nazareth proclaiming “hometown of Jesus of Nazareth.” Why not? That’s what we want to consider this morning:

Hometown lessons

- 1. Amazing unbelief**
- 2. Amazing grace**

The setting for our text is the synagogue in Nazareth. After preaching and performing miracles all over Galilee and receiving enthusiastic receptions wherever he went, Jesus has come back to his hometown with his disciples. On the Sabbath day Jesus went to the synagogue—the parallel account in Luke says “as was his custom.” Because Jesus was a visiting rabbi—a teacher—he was invited to read a portion of scripture and then preach. We’re told in Luke that **“he stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and**

recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

This wasn't a random choice of texts that Jesus chose. With Jesus, nothing is just a mere coincidence. Jesus chose a familiar prophecy that 700 years before his birth beautifully described the mission of the Messiah and perfectly described exactly what Jesus had been doing all over Galilee.

So what is the reaction of the people in Jesus' hometown? Do they give him a standing ovation? Ask him to come back next Sabbath day? Decide to take a door offering to pay for a sign on the road leading into town: “You are entering Nazareth—hometown of Jesus, the promised Messiah.” Mark says, “Many who heard him were amazed.” Amazement—on the surface not a surprising reaction, except for the focus of their amazement. Mark says, **“They asked, ‘Where did this man get these things? In Greek this carries a tone of contempt—where would “...*this man* get these things. What things? They asked: **What’s this wisdom that has been given to him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?’”****

Rather than directing their attention to Jesus' message, they were obsessed with the background of the man delivering that message. Look at what they recognized: they acknowledged the uniqueness of his message; they acknowledged his wisdom; and they didn't deny the fact he had performed miracles. So what was their problem? Why the contempt? They recognized the “what”. They refused to recognize the “who”—they refused to believe that this man Jesus could be capable of that message, miracles and wisdom. Why? Listen to their rationale: **Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?”**

Jesus had given them every reason to believe. He had purposely preached all over Galilee before coming home to Nazareth. He had performed a number of miracles, including casting out demons and raising Jairus' daughter. In Luke we're told that “news about him had spread through the whole countryside.” And after he stands up in his hometown synagogue and reads from Isaiah 61, Luke tells us that he told all those in church that morning, **“Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** His message was clear: *I am the Messiah! I am the one*

for whom you've been waiting. I'm the one you have just heard about, the one that God promised. And here I am! Back home, right where I want to be.

Such clear evidence—and yet they refuse to believe. Is it any wonder then that in verse 6 of our text we're told that Jesus **“was amazed at their lack of faith”**? The irony is that even though Jesus grew up in their town, even though many of them had known Jesus since he about 2 years old, they viewed Jesus as an imposter. “How CAN he be the Messiah? He's a carpenter's son and no more than a carpenter himself!” Mark says “that they took offense at him.” The verb for “took offense” has the primary meaning of “to be ensnared or entrapped,” and the tense that is used implies an ongoing action. The more they listened and thought about what he said, the more entangled they became in their own irrational obstinance. And so we're told that with such a sad heart **Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.”**

What lessons do we learn from this rejection of Jesus? Two thoughts to consider:

1. If Jesus himself was rejected by those closest to him, then we can expect that our own efforts at sharing Jesus with others won't always be met with eager ears and glad gratitude. “Who are you to tell me what God says?” “Who made you judge over me?” “Learn to mind your own business.”

When God gives you the opportunity to speak the truth in love and point out the sin of homosexuality...or in our circles the more common sin of homophobia—there is a good chance that you will be rejected. When God gives you the opportunity to point out the sins of racism and hatred in someone close to you—there is a good chance that you will be mocked. When God gives you the opportunity to encourage someone who has fallen into unrepentant sin or drifted away into spiritual apathy—there is a good chance that you will be told to mind your own business.

2. And a second thought to consider: Are any of us bold enough to say, “I would never react to a clear message from God's Word the same way the people of Nazareth did”? The people who rejected Jesus weren't the non-religious, no use for church crowd. They were in church—most probably faithfully attended church every week—but they still rejected Jesus' message. That's not to say that a wholesale rejection of the Bible is right around the corner for any of us. But

seldom does Satan succeed in wiping out someone's faith overnight. Instead, he tries to chip away at our faith by tempting us to pick and choose what we believe and what we reject.

What wrestling matches do you have or have you had with God's Word? Is it the relevance of God's moral code—a moral code established thousands of years ago? Is it Jesus' command in the Sermon on the Mount to not worry but to trust God—but you struggle to accept the fact that there are things that you cannot control? Is it Jesus' command to love your enemy—but you find yourself overwhelmed by anger and hatred for anyone who won't vote the same way as you in November? Or is it struggling with God's promise that he will work everything out for the good of his people—and we wonder what possible good can come from 6 deaths in one extended family? Who is this God who would allow such a tragedy?

Whatever our struggle—or more likely—our struggles, the vital hometown lesson we learn from our text isn't to shake our heads with Jesus at the lack of belief in Nazareth, or those around us today or even to hang our heads in shame at our own struggles. The biggest takeaway found in these first verses of Mark isn't man's amazing unbelief—it's Jesus' amazing grace.

II. And where do we find amazing grace in this six verse heart-breaking story of a little town's rejection of their Savior? In two of the six verses. Verse 1: **Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.** Jesus left Capernaum where he had raised a little 12 year old girl from the dead and headed out on a 40 mile walk to Nazareth. Such amazing grace. Why amazing? Because Jesus knew what would happen. Instead of receiving a hero's welcome from friends, neighbors and family, instead of a visit filled with nostalgic memories and good times, instead of guest-preaching a sermon and then enjoying a potluck meal in the fellowship hall, Jesus would preach a sermon and then according to the account in Luke, be bull-rushed out of the synagogue by a congregation intent on throwing him off a cliff. Jesus knew that, and he went there anyway. Why? Because that's what Jesus does. No matter how many or how few people would listen, no matter how welcoming or obstinate people might be, Jesus went where he was needed. And Nazareth needed him.

The second gospel verse in this text is verse 5: **He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.** At first glance there doesn't seem to be

anything positive in this verse. If anything, it seems like a disappointing report. **“Jesus could not do any miracles there.”** It’s fair to ask, “But why not?” If Jesus is the Son of God and can do anything, then why couldn’t he perform miracles in Nazareth? It wasn’t because Jesus had lost the power and ability to do miracles. Jesus doesn’t force himself on those who reject him. Rather, he only laid his hands on a few people because only a few people in faith came to Jesus.

Yet isn’t it in this verse that you and I are able to find great comfort? Do you see where? Do you see yourself? Right here...part of the few. Jesus came and helped **a few**. Even though Jesus knew the majority would have no use for him, Jesus still made the trip to Nazareth for **a few**. Even though only a few people in worship that morning really wanted to hear what he had to say, Jesus shared God’s promises anyway. Why? Because that’s what Jesus does. In the first chapter of his gospel the apostle John says of Jesus: “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” How sad. But John doesn’t stop there: **“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”**

Children of God. What a beautiful description of the few in Nazareth whose faith in Jesus wasn’t for nothing. Children of God. What a beautiful description of Pastor Steve Witte, two of his daughters and three of his granddaughters who arrived in heaven just a week ago. Pastor Steve Kuehl lost his wife Charis and daughter Stella in that fire. Yesterday he shared this: ***“My daughters and I are still shocked at the suddenness of Charis' and Stella's flight to heaven, as well as that of our other relatives. We know that, for each of them, their primary identity is "child of the Heavenly Father" and so by God's grace we aren't asking the 'why' question so many others are asking. Because, of course, it is entirely within the Lord's loving will to call his beloved children home to himself in heaven... to live the Life that is truly life.”***

Who could write such words in the face of such tragedy? Only a child of God. How can a child of God have the faith to write such words? By God’s amazing grace. Do not wonder, "Could I ever write those words?" Instead, in wonder look in a mirror and say, "I too am a child of my heavenly Father." What amazing grace. What a blessing. What comfort. Amen.

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