

“The Challenges of Going Home”

Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”

Mark 6:1-13

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Mark 6:1-13 (New International Version)

A Prophet Without Honor

¹Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ²When 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, that he even does miracles! ³Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, ^aJudas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

⁴Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor."

⁵He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil ^bspirits.

⁸These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. ¹⁰Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

¹²They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Footnotes:

- a. [Mark 6:3](#) Greek Josés, a variant of Joseph
- b. [Mark 6:7](#) Greek unclean

Introduction.

Going home can sometimes be difficult, and you never know quite what you'll find when you go home. A number of years ago I attended my 20th High School Reunion in Atlanta, GA. If you have seen the film *The Blind Side*, it was filmed at my old high school in Atlanta. Here's a picture of me in the school year book my senior year. I weighed 244 my senior year!

The 20th Reunion would be the first time I would see most of the people I went to school with since we graduated. I experienced a great deal of anticipation and excitement as I looked forward to this event, and I wondered what I would find in the people with whom I had spent 4 years of my life.

The day came when the first party of the reunion was scheduled. It was to be a class members only party so we could get all the foolishness of seeing old friends out of the way without our spouses having to endure our antics as we relived our high school days. I drove to the American Legion Hall where the party was held, and I walked in. Some of the people I recognized instantly, and others had to tell me their names. There are still a couple of guys who



acted like we had been best buddies in high school, and for the life of me I still can't place them anywhere in my memory!

Over the course of the evening, I experienced the gamut of emotions. I was happy, sad, thrilled, disappointed, shocked and surprised. Some of my classmates' lives turned out very well, but there were others for whom my heart broke as they related to me their stories of life since high school. Most of my friends didn't recognize me at first. "Peter! Is that you? You've lost weight since high school. You've lost your hair, too!? What do you do for a living? You're a Presbyterian pastor now!? Hmmmm. That's not what I would have figured you'd be doing!"

Going home can be difficult. People you once knew, people with whom you were once so close change. They're different, and you're different, too. Sometimes it's hard pick up where you left off, and your lives have moved in different directions.

In the passage before us this morning, we read of a time when Jesus went home. It was a difficult time for Him, too, and He experienced misunderstanding and rejection, all by people who once had known Him well.

I. Some Were Amazed.

Jesus returned to Nazareth, which was His home town. While He was born in Bethlehem, it was in Nazareth where Jesus spent all His years growing up as a kid and as a young man. Nazareth wasn't much of a town. It was a community in the backwaters of northern Israel whose population probably never exceeded 2,000 residents. It was one of those places where everybody knew everyone else's business, sort of like living in a small town in west Texas.

Those of you who grew up there know what I'm talking about. I talked to Jodie Rapp, a new member in our church, last Sunday and learned that his graduating class in high school in a little town in west Texas had 16 people! I suspect Jodie knows what growing up in Nazareth was like!

Jesus returned to His hometown with His disciples, and on the Sabbath He went into the synagogue. It was the custom to invite visiting rabbis to teach, so Jesus was invited by the ruler of the synagogue to give the message that day. This was probably the first time the people of His community had ever actually heard Him teach, and I suspect they were curious to hear what He had to say. There was a buzz in the place when Jesus walked to the front of the synagogue, and the scroll of Scripture was handed to Him to read.

The passage tells us that many of them were amazed at what Jesus said, and they marveled at His teaching. Have you ever made of study of how many times the word "amazed" is used in the gospels to describe the reaction of people to Jesus?

- Earlier in the Gospel of Mark we read where at the beginning of Jesus' ministry "*the people were all so **amazed** that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey Him."* (Mk. 1:27).
- When Jesus healed the man who was crippled, The Bible tells us the man "*got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This **amazed** everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" (Mk. 2:12).*
- In chapter 5 we read about the man from whom an evil spirit had been cast, and "*the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were **amazed**" (Mk. 5:20).*
- When our Lord walked on water later in chapter 6, Jesus called out to the disciples and said, "*Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.*' Then He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely **amazed**" (Mk. 6:51).



- Toward the end of His ministry, “*the chief priests and the teachers of the law...began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared Jesus, because the whole crowd was **amazed** at his teaching. (Mk. 11:18).*
- And when our Lord stood before Pilate just before His crucifixion, “*Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was **amazed**” (Mk. 15:5).*

Ron Ragsdale explains in the Bible Reading Plan in the bulletin this morning that the Greek word for “amazed” is the word *εκπλῆσσω*. It is a stronger word than we usually give it credit; more like “psychologically overwhelmed” or “astonished.” We have an English word from the same root – “apoplectic,” like when a person has a stroke. The Bible says people were amazed by Jesus.

When was the last time you were amazed by our Lord? I think most of us are too busy to stop and be amazed. Our lives are so full and we are so focused on accomplishing the things on our “to do” list that we don’t have time to stop and be amazed. But God does amazing things all around us every day, but we’re too busy to notice.

When was the last time you were amazed by God? At the birth of a child? When you received an unexpected answer to prayer? While watching a beautiful sunset in the Texas hill country? When you got an A on a test for which you hadn’t studied, and you realized God bailed you out...again? In the warm embrace of your wife of 50 years, just thanking God for the companion she has been all this time?

Lorie and I have a friend in Australia who was an exchange student that lived with Lorie’s family her senior year in high school. Jude is so full of life, and she is so expressive in her observations. Whenever she sees something that impresses her, she remarks, “That’s *amazing!*” Jude came to visit us in Colorado several years ago, and when she saw the mountains, she remarked, “They’re so *amazing!*” Driving down the road, she saw some beautiful purple flowers and said, “Look at those flowers! They’re *amazing!*” Jude is one of the most positive, expressive people I’ve ever met, and she is a person who is amazed by life. I want to be more like that.

When Jesus returned to Nazareth and gave his first sermon in His hometown, some of the people were amazed. However, others were offended.

II. Others Were Offended.

The text tells us that while some of the people in the synagogue were amazed, others took offense, and there was an undercurrent of doubt as questions began to fly. “*Where did this man get these things? What’s this wisdom that has been given to Him, that He even does miracles?*” In other words, who does he think He is?

The hostility of the townspeople toward Jesus came out even more clearly when they asked the rhetorical questions, “*Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t He just a common, ordinary man who made His living like the rest of us? Isn’t this Mary’s son? Aren’t His brothers and sisters still here with us?*”

The question about Jesus being Mary’s son was derogatory since it was not customary among the Jews to describe a man as the son of his mother, even when the father was not living. Behind the question was the rumor that Jesus was illegitimate. Joseph was no longer in the picture, and most scholars believe he died sometime before Jesus began His public ministry. People couldn’t resist calling into question what they thought was Jesus’ illegitimate birth, and they asked, “Who does He think He is lecturing us?”



It was difficult for our Lord when He returned home, and some of the people took offense at Him. The reality of the matter is that the Gospel is offensive to some. The word that is translated "offense" in this text is the Greek word σκανδαλιζομαι, from which we get our English word "scandal." The Gospel is scandalous, and it is offensive. Why? Because the Gospel says you cannot save yourself, you cannot earn your way to heaven, and you and I need a Savior.

Many people have the mistaken idea that if my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, then God will accept me, and I will go to heaven. They think that God somehow has this divine scale in heaven with which He weighs our moral lives. However, this view is more akin to our notion of Santa Claus than it is to a true picture of God. Santa is the one who is making a list and checking it twice; he's gonna find out whose naughty or nice! Not God.

The Bible says you and I fall short of God's ideal for life, and we break His heart as well as His law in the way we live our lives every day. One of the Greek words for "sin" is the word αμαρτανω. It was use in the world of archery. Whenever someone shot an arrow at the target, if they failed to hit the bulls eye, someone would call "αμαρτανω!" "You missed the mark!" All of us miss the mark of living the holy life God desires. Some like Mother Teresa get close, but we all fall short. That's why Jesus came to the earth. To pay the penalty of our sin and provide the salvation we need. It's a free gift of grace.

Some people are even offended by grace. At last Tuesday's men's bible study, Mike Douglas shared a scene from C.S. Lewis' book *The Great Divorce*. It's not a book about marriage and divorce; it's a book about the choices we make regarding Jesus and His scandalous gift grace. In the book there is a story of a man from hell who takes a mythical bus ride to heaven. When he arrives, he is met by his assigned guide. Over the course of the visit, he learns that his guide had once been a murderer in his previous life on earth, and he had been forgiven by God when he gave his life to Christ. The passenger rejects heaven and returns to the bus because he is disgusted that they let guys like this murderer into heaven. The man didn't want grace; he wanted what he deserved. The guide tried to talk him out of it, but all to no avail.

Notice the contrast in this passage. Some of the people in Jesus' hometown were amazed, while others were offended. But that's the way it's always been. Jesus is a person who not only divided human history in two; His radical words and sacrificial life of love call for a response, and it sometimes brings division. You will either be drawn to Jesus and be amazed at who He is and what He's done, or you will take offense and find yourself walking away, insulted that God would require you to bow your knee to His Son or troubled that the cost of discipleship is so high. The choice is ours.

III. Still Others Were Sent Out.

The passage concludes with Jesus sending out the 12 disciples on a mission. Notice that our Lord did several things in sending them out. First, He called them to Himself for fellowship. It was important that they spend time with Jesus before they undertook their mission. Next, Jesus organized them into teams and sent them out two by two. None of them went alone; they always had a partner in mission. Then He gave them specific instructions about what to do and how to respond if someone rejected their message. They had a clear assignment with clear instructions. Finally, Jesus equipped them by giving them His authority and His power. They were to be His ambassadors proclaiming His message of repentance.

That's great leadership development! It's a model we all could follow. I'm struck by the fact that Jesus encouraged teamwork even with the earliest disciples. He never engaged in



ministry by Himself, and He never sent His disciples out alone. Ministry and mission is best carried out in community. Decisions are best made in community. And vision is best developed and cast in community. Presbyterians have long believed this to be true, and we see it reinforced here in this passage. That's something the deacons and elders of our church who have been ordained and installed today should keep in mind as they begin their terms of service. We are called to lead in community

I think it's important to notice that, in the instructions Jesus gave His disciples, He did not call them to be successful, only faithful. "Travel light; take just enough for what you need," He said. "Don't hop around from house to house; rather, develop deeper relationships with a few people who show you hospitality. Some will not accept your message, but don't worry about that. If they won't listen to you, shake the dust off your feet and move to another place that is more receptive."

Never once did our Lord say the Christian life would be easy. Rather, He prepared His disciples for possible rejection. Our Lord knew that if some people were offended at what He had to say, His disciples would face a similar reaction. And so it has been throughout human history.

Conclusion.

Going home can be tough. You meet a lot of different reactions from people. Bill Robinson, the president of Whitworth University, writes about the time when he learned his childhood friend Dennis Hastert was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives by his peers. His first reaction was, "Well, well, little Denny Hastert is now the Speaker of the House. Isn't it amazing that one of our own could rise to such a high office." Then his next reaction was, "Oh, my Lord! Little Denny Hastert is now the Speaker of the House! How could someone I knew as a kid rise to such a position of power?! I hope he's up to the task!"

Isn't it remarkable how hard it is for us to acknowledge that one of our own could be used of God to do amazing things? But when we're able to see a hometown kid become a hero, it can be quite a thrill. I'm sure there were some in Nazareth who experienced this.

Tonight Drew Brees will be playing in the Super Bowl for the NFC Champion New Orleans Saints. He played football just down the road at Westlake High School. None of the Texas schools recruited him because they thought he was too short and couldn't be a big time college quarterback, but he proved them all wrong. He went on to set Big 10 passing records at Purdue, he won the Maxwell Award, was a Heisman Trophy finalist, and he was also an Academic All American.

After a couple of All Pro seasons with the San Diego Chargers, Drew was injured in the last game of the 2005 season against the Denver Broncos. He suffered a torn labrum and rotator cuff damage in his throwing shoulder. Doctors told him he had a 1 in 500 chance of full recovery. San Diego decided to go with a new quarterback, Phillip Rivers, and Drew was traded to the New Orleans Saints.

In a recent interview Drew said, "Had I never had my injury in San Diego, there is no telling how long I would have been in there....The timing (of my coming to New Orleans) was truly a calling and something I was meant to do. Everything happens for a reason. At the time, you may be wondering, 'Why is this happening?' But you have to trust that it's all for the greater good."

"When I had the injury in San Diego, I thought it was the worst thing that could have happened to me at the worst time. I asked, 'Why me? Why now?' But I look back now and see



that it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Otherwise I never would have had the opportunity to be part of New Orleans and I never would have been part of the rebuilding effort for this city. And I never would have had the opportunity to take my career to the next level like I've been able to do here. It made me a tougher person mentally and spiritually, and I thank God for how he used that adversity for good in my life.”

“I trust in the Lord, and I trust that He has a plan for my life. He'll never put anything in front of you that's too hard for you to do. So whatever comes your way God will help you overcome it, and it will make you stronger. He will enable you influence others in a positive way and spread the blessings to help other people.”

So while you're cheering for Drew tonight, a hometown hero and a dream come true, remember another hometown hero, the Savior Drew loves, even Jesus Christ, and make room in your heart for our Lord in ways the folks in Nazareth never did. Let's be like those who were amazed at who Jesus is and all He's done for you, and Drew, and me! Amen.

