

Mark 6:1-6  
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
July 11, 2021

If you grew up elsewhere, do you enjoy returning to your hometown? It can be fun to view familiar sites. It can also be sad when things are not like what you remember. Some people want nothing to do with their past, for they have bad memories. They have moved on and are glad to be gone. Today in the Gospel reading Jesus returned to Nazareth and it wasn't a happy scene.

Nazareth is the town where Jesus grew up. You will recall that Joseph and Mary were from there. They were betrothed, which meant they had formally announced their intent to wed but had not yet begun the marriage. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would become pregnant as the result of a miraculous conception by the power of the Holy Spirit. She took some time to visit her relative Elizabeth, who was expecting John the Baptist, despite her age and previous infertility. God's angel also appeared to Joseph and told him to go ahead with the marriage plans; that Mary had not been unfaithful to him.

Nearing the delivery time the couple journeyed to Bethlehem to register for tax purposes. There Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable. They stayed for a time. When the Magi came from the east in search of the newborn king, Herod became jealous and sought to kill the child. God was a step ahead of him and warned Joseph in a dream, so the family headed for Egypt. After the death of Herod they returned to the Holy Land and settled in Nazareth.

In Nazareth life proceeded as normal. Jesus grew up. Were there other children in the family? It would seem that way as we have brothers named and mention of sisters, although the terms could refer to cousins or half-brothers and half-sisters. (Of course, that's the most anyone could be, right?) The boy Jesus would have attended the synagogue school and learned the trade of carpentry from Joseph. Houses there were built of stone, but carpenters made furniture and utensils for the home. An early source says Jesus made plows and yokes.

By this time Joseph had likely died since he is not mentioned. The sisters were still around, as they may have married local fellows. There is speculation that the brothers had gone to Capernaum with Jesus, who used that city as a base of operations.

As an adult Jesus began his public ministry. He was age thirty, as that's when you were respected enough to be a rabbi (that is, a teacher). His baptism served as the inauguration into that work. Then he headed into the wilderness where he faced numerous temptations and defeated Satan for us by using God's Word.

He went about the land, preaching in the cities and villages and gathering the twelve disciples for training. His teaching often involved parables, in which he used everyday scenes to illustrate spiritual truths. Crowds gathered to see and hear him. He performed all sorts of miracles that demonstrated divine power and backed up his testimony. The people in Nazareth had been hearing what was going on.

Now Jesus had returned to Nazareth. He came to share the message of salvation. He was not there on vacation, for a family reunion, homecoming, alumni gathering or trip down memory lane. He was filled with care and concern for the souls of the residents. He knew them and loved them as he does all of us. I'm sure he felt a special bond with those among whom he had lived and grown up. He wanted them to believe and be saved.

So he preached in their synagogue, no doubt the same one where he had attended school during the week and worship on Saturdays. He was invited to take part in the service this Sabbath. As always, he would preach law and gospel. He wasn't there to impress them with high-falutin language. Sometimes a student who has been off to college will try to impress the homefolks with big words and terms from their chosen field. Jesus taught with authority. He knew the Word. He did not merely share human opinions about the Word or added laws and explanations that missed its intent.

The message of law cut to the heart. It was sharp and diagnosed their sin malady. He called them to repentance. Has it happened to you? A sermon hit the exact situation in which you were involved. There was that argument you had to win despite being on questionable grounds. You attacked someone with unthinking and unkind criticism. You took self-centered actions with a me-first attitude. You tried to get something dishonestly—you tried to make it look right but hoped for the downfall of the other, that they would lose business and have to sell their enterprise. You showed disrespect for authority—like the Jewish people, who despised the Romans and their enforced rule—as you said, “I didn't vote for that person; I don't support their policies, so I can badmouth them all I want.” You were filled with love for money, shown in frenzied activity to get more or fear you don't have enough. You viewed other people as objects to be used and abused.

Whatever it was, the sermon hit the nail on the head. Jesus' words did that in the synagogue of Nazareth. He called for repentance. He also told the people to trust him and the forgiveness he was bringing.

His message produced a reaction. They were amazed, and it wasn't with the awe of faith. They were dumbfounded and upset. His words challenged their mindset. "Wait a minute! He has gone too far. Who does he think he is? We know him. We saw him grow up. We played ball together. He's just a carpenter." "Where did this man get these things?" Notice they wouldn't even call Jesus by name. "What's this wisdom that has been given him?" We went to the same school he did. He was smart but not that special. The Bible answers their question. In Deuteronomy the Lord had foretold about the Messiah through Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him." Jesus had performed miracles. They couldn't deny what had happened, for there were so many witnesses, maybe even some of their own number. How was it possible?

"And they took offense at him." Literally it says they were scandalized. They tripped the trigger of the trap. Some people trip over a trap, stumble, and rise again. Not here. They tripped a fatal trigger. They were caught, doomed. They reacted with unbelief. They rejected the Savior. And that means being lost eternally.

That's not a problem for us, right? Don't be too sure. The teachings of God's Word can seem all too familiar to us. We've heard it all before in childhood. So I can skip now and then. I don't need to attend church every week. I don't need to take any more classes. Besides such an attitude in general, it may be a special temptation on a nice summer day, on vacation, or when we have company. At times we prefer something new and different. We find that fascinating, not the "same old, same old". Maybe there's a reason it is new: it is not in the Word. That kind of desire has led scholars into false teaching. I'm not just pointing fingers at others. Feeling the Word is too familiar can be a danger for church workers, with the result that we make only professional use of the Bible, preparing lessons and sermons but do not feed our own faith.

The result is missing out on the blessings Jesus wants to bring. He was amazed at the reaction of his fellow Nazarenes, and it was not the amazement of joy. He was disappointed, for he cared for them and wanted to save them. Their stubborn unbelief was more than others showed. Some who did not respond with faith at least saw that he operated with divine help. They asked for more proof. Here their

minds were made up. Jesus met solid rejection. If this incident was the same one recorded in Luke's Gospel, the people responded by trying to kill him. If it was a different visit, it was another rebuff of his efforts. The people didn't even take advantage of his ability to do miracles. He only healed a few sick ones.

The same can happen to us. We doubt God's power so we don't bring our needs to him in prayer. We don't confess our sins against the Lord and seek his mercy. Then we also miss the gospel. Jesus won full and free forgiveness for the world. It is ready and waiting, given freely by him. His sacrifice for sins ends up being wasted. Don't let that happen to you! Hear and heed the Word of the Lord. Cling to the Savior in faith.

Did these people change later? The brother James believed and became a leader in the early Christian church. It is thought by many that the Judas mentioned here is the author of the epistle of Jude. What about the others? We don't know about the general population. Even if some might later repent, why wait? We can't change what happened then and there, but we can attend to our own souls. Don't let reason or familiarity get in the way. Repent and believe in Jesus as your Savior.

Jesus is not standing in our pulpit today. But his Word is here. Are you? In what condition—ignoring what he says, with your mind wandering or drifting, rejecting his truths? What about next week? Will you be here? What contact will you have with God's Word on the days in between?

Don't get trapped. Take your Savior's message to heart. Believe it. Rejoice in the good news of forgiveness. Serve your Lord as you tell others and as you follow God's ways. Live in confidence for eternity, knowing that heaven is your home. Be confident about life now on this earth, positive that your Lord will guide your ways, bless you abundantly, support and strengthen you as you face your daily challenges, protect you from harm and make sure everything turns out for your good. Never feel too familiar with his Word but soak it up, eager for more. You will face negative reactions as you live and work for the Savior. His gospel will provide the power to witness faithfully and to live victoriously. Don't get trapped but get empowered for life and eternity.