

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
July 15, 2012**

**Mark 6:1-6**

**Rejection of the Hometown Hero!**

**Hymns: 223 – 448 – 404 – 428 – Closing: 260**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

There are small towns littered across America that have one. It might be a politician that climbed the ladder, or a movie star that escaped to the big lights of the city. It might be an astronaut that went into space or a soldier that heroically fought for his country. No matter what the person might be famous for, back home they might simply be referred to as the hometown hero. It's the native son that the entire city takes pride in calling one of their own. If you visit the town, every person will claim to be connected with them in some way. They'll point you to the house where they grew up. They'll tell you all about their family. They'll give you the dish on the trouble they got into as a child, just so you know they know.

If the hero is big enough, you might even see a sign outside of town "Childhood home of So and So!" You would have to think that when the hometown hero returns to town, life is good. People would be happy to see him. He would receive smiles and hugs and handshakes wherever he goes. Treated well. After all, it isn't every day that someone famous comes from your town.

You would probably think that it might have been the same way in the little northern town of Nazareth around the year 30 A.D. In his 6<sup>th</sup> chapter, Mark takes us to the time

that Jesus returned to his hometown. At this point when he returned to little Nazareth, Jesus would have been a famous person all over the nation of Israel. There is absolutely no doubt that the news about what the native son had been doing had gotten back home. He was travelling throughout the land, driving out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead; all while huge crowds were following him everywhere that he went. I'm kind of surprised that Mark doesn't tell us that a ticker tape parade welcomed Jesus as he came back into town. After all, Nazareth didn't exactly have a great deal to take pride in.

However, it doesn't appear that Jesus was welcomed back as the hometown hero at all. In fact, the reaction to Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth was quite the opposite of what we might expect for someone who had brought notoriety to a generally "frowned upon" border town.

Listen again to what Mark says, **"Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 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, that he even does miracles! 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."**

While Mark tells us that the people of Nazareth took offense, Luke gives us a few more details about their reaction in his account of this journey to the hometown. Luke 4 tells us they became so furious that they dragged Jesus out of town, attempting to throw the native son off a cliff in anger.

As we think about what those people did, it seems so strange that they would react in this negative way. Why would they move to kill the son of Mary, one of the women of the community? Both Mark and Luke tell us that at first the people were amazed at what Jesus was saying, what changed? How could they turn so quickly on someone they knew so well?

As you think about those questions, put yourself into Nazareth as a longtime citizen. You are a Jewish person who has been looking for the long-awaited Messiah, the Deliverer sent from God himself. Finally, a day comes when a man comes into the Synagogue, he reads from the scroll of Isaiah the prophet, he reads a verse that speaks about the salvation that the Messiah would bring. After shutting that scroll, he proclaims powerfully that he is the fulfillment of those words. He is the Messiah, the chosen one from God. Your heart fills with joy, you are overwhelmed with excitement.

But then, you start to think. The man who has made this pronouncement is a Nazarene just like you. In fact, you know all about his life. You remember him as a child, one of the sons of Mary and Joseph. You remember him observing the Sabbath in the Synagogue just like everyone else and celebrating the Passover. You recall how he learned carpentry in his father's shop, how you went to him occasionally to get a repair. Most striking as you think about this man claiming to be the Messiah is that there wasn't anything very striking from the 30 years he spent in Nazareth.

Certainly, this is not what you expected from the Messiah! This "normal" Nazarene can't be what God was having you wait thousands of years for! This hometown version of the Messiah doesn't quite do it

for you! He doesn't meet what you think the Savior should be. And though Jesus tells you to believe, you go with your head and you reject. You and your fellow Nazarenes reject, so offended that you refuse to come to Jesus at all, even for the healing which he has shown he can provide.

That is the sad reality that came to the people in Jesus' hometown; they rejected the returning hometown hero. Though they were privileged to have the Savior of the world in their midst, though they knew him better than anyone, they didn't "know" him. They didn't believe in who he was. They didn't find the salvation that he brought. It is a sad, sad story that we have in front of us in the Gospels. So close to Jesus, yet ... unbelief ... and rejection ...

And sadly, that sad story of rejection continues today. I'd guess that almost every one of you knows somebody who grew up in the church and has since fallen away. It might even be someone close to you, a brother or sister, a son or daughter, a close grade school friend. You know people who grew up with Jesus. They have been told all about what Jesus has done; they know the Bible stories from front to back. They know Jesus just like those people in Nazareth, and what happens? They come to a point in life where they reject Jesus. They push him away. They decide they want something else. Just like those people rejecting their hometown hero in Nazareth, Jesus is no longer good enough.

For so many who grow up with Jesus, there is a huge temptation for all of "this" to become too familiar. The old expression is that "familiarity breeds contempt," and that can definitely happen in the church. Just like those Nazarenes that wanted something more, the lure of excitement can certainly lead Christians to go out in search

of something else. When “this” becomes old and boring, there is a temptation to find something that strikes our senses. Veterans of the cross can tire of facing struggle and hardship and being told that it’s just the way it is for followers of Christ. How often isn’t the temptation to join with those people from Nazareth in saying, “This is it? This is all that Christianity brings to my life? I want more.” And the longer we are with Christ, the more we have to fight that temptation that comes with familiarity.

The way to fight, ironically, is to be in the Word. Church becomes routine when we fail to get in the Word on our own, applying its timeless truths to our individual lives, and remembering the amazing stories that we have long forgotten. The Sacrament becomes something that lengthens the service when we don’t take time to examine ourselves and think about the tremendous sacrifice that brings us the body and blood. Fighting off contempt takes work.

And when people don’t put in that time, they will leave, they will become bored with Jesus, they will say that Jesus doesn’t do it for them anymore; and that brings a temptation to the church as well. We can start to have doubts about the way in which we bring the Word to the world. Do we change the message to tell people what their itching ears want to hear? Do we focus on this life and show people the way to find fun and happiness and success? Do we strive to appeal to what people want, sacrificing what they need? It is a trap that many churches fall into. In their efforts to bring something new and exciting, they sacrifice the truth of Scripture.

On that point we need to be clear. There is certainly freedom in the way in which we do ministry, freedom in the way that we

worship, freedom in the method that we preach and teach the Word. And we as a church and we as people better always be watching to make sure that it isn’t us and our selfishness that are causing others to leave. However, there is not freedom in who you worship, there is not freedom in what you preach and teach.

And that truth leads us to the important realization that Mark brings us to today. Just as Jesus was rejected in Nazareth, the Hero will be rejected among us as well. It pained Jesus greatly to see how he was rejected in his hometown, because those people had everything in front of them. No excuses. It will also bring us great pain when Jesus is rejected by those we know who have everything right in front of them as well. But it will happen. The Word today tells us that clearly.

And that isn’t a message that brings us a lot of joy, is it? Seeing Jesus rejected in his hometown and knowing that it will happen among us is not going to bring a smile to our faces. Yet, it can give us a certain amount of confidence and that is what we look for when we come to the Word. That rejecting is a result of presenting the truth. When we preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, when people reject, when people take offense, when people leave, we know we are following in our Savior’s path. So while it never feels good to see people turn their backs, the “good news” is that Jesus has promised to reward our faithfulness to his Word. The good news is that we continue to have the truth. And holding that truth is where our strength to continue on and our confidence to stand come from.

As we look at the tough reality of this text today, it is good for us to end with a prayer: **Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church, As we follow your command to go and preach the**

truth of your Word, we are met with the sad reality that you will face rejection now, just as you once did in your hometown. Lord, we ask that those who see you through your Word, those who grow up with you in their lives would never push you to the side, failing to see you as their Savior. Give all of us perseverance, both in remaining strong in our faith and in continuing to share our faith. As we face the struggles of rejection, give us confidence that those who follow you have lasting joys in store for them in the glories of heaven. We ask this in your name, Amen.