

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA  
Proper 9, Year B, July 8, 2018  
The Rev. Bill Queen, "Jesus In Our Hometown"  
Mark 6:1-13

our Gospel passage today, in addition to teaching us about Jesus, also teaches us about our own approach to living out our faith here in our hometown; this is the kind of connection we always need to be trying to draw when we read and study the Bible: first being clear about what the Bible says and then being clear about how we enact what the Bible teaches in our lives; the Bible should always be for us thought-provoking, then prayer-provoking, and then action-provoking

the first thing we see is Jesus coming back "to his hometown" of Nazareth after having already begun his ministry of teaching and healing; they know him; they recognize him as "the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and ... his sisters" (who, unfortunately, do not rate enough to be either counted or named); that's a large family, for whom we presume Jesus was the main provider after Joseph's death, since Jesus was the eldest son

how do you normally picture Jesus: off alone praying, or conversing with his small band of disciples, or surrounded by large crowds? that would be a true picture from his roughly three years of ministry; but we probably seldom, if ever, picture him (beyond his baby in the manger stage of life) surrounded by his family, his mother, brothers, and sisters, earning a living as a carpenter, for the roughly thirty years of his life; it's something to ponder, just how this long engagement with his family, in one place, in his hometown, with other relatives and neighbors, shopkeepers and other tradesmen, shaped and formed the ministry that would follow after it; this is a reminder to us of the importance of our family life as the source from which we draw our support to do our ministries; ask yourself: how does your relationship to family, relatives, neighbors, and all of the people around you stand as a foundation upon which you build and exercise your faith?

next we see Jesus' neighbors asking, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him?" they recognize there is something far more to him than just the carpenter they once knew; we might tend to

think that Jesus was born with all his gifts, abilities, and wisdom, or that it came to him whenever needed, as if he had a direct satellite link to God from which he could download wisdom, ready formed; the gospel account suggests otherwise; Jesus was certainly gifted in abilities, but it appears he acquired his wisdom in very human ways; Luke's account of Jesus in the Temple at age 12 (2:41-52) is the only gospel story that tells us anything about Jesus between his infancy and his baptism, when he started his ministry, as a 30 year old adult

recall that Jesus was left behind, inadvertently, in Jerusalem; when they found him three days later he was in the Temple, sitting among the teachers there, "listening to them and asking them questions;" the story ends by noting that "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years;" as he grew up, he grew wiser and wiser; he acquired his wisdom; we also know he knew how to read, not usual for a carpenter, so we presume Jesus spent much time at his local synagogue, praying, reading the scriptures, studying, committing passages to memory, and continuing to discuss matters with rabbis; this is a reminder to us of the importance of our need to continue asking questions and seeking answers; ask yourself: do you continue to ask questions and deepen your faith? do you have a discipline of prayer and Bible study that increases your faith? and are you seeking not just learning, but wisdom?

the final thing we see is that "Jesus could do no deeds of power there" because his neighbors doubted and did not believe in him; they probably doubted largely because they'd seen him grow up; they thought they knew him; but they only knew him from the outside, from his family and trade connections; they had no idea of his rich interior life, accumulated wisdom, and power that now, for the first time, was showing itself to the outside world

this incident is unique as the only time that Jesus is powerless; his power is thwarted because he needed the willing participation of people who believed in him; this is a reminder to us that God does not coerce or force us; we are not puppets responding to God's pulling of strings; rather, we are God's children, created in God's own image and invited into a mutual loving relationship with God; ask yourself: do you have an understanding of Jesus from the inside, not just from the outside? and do you cultivate a relationship with God, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit in which you actively participate in that relationship?

think about how some of the particulars of what this story has to teach us get played out in our lives; if we practice our faith only at church or in church-related ministries, then our family, relatives, and neighbors do not receive the benefits from our witness to faith; if we are lax in our life of prayer, then some of the power and results that come from prayer will not get fully exercised for us and for those around us; if we are lax in asking questions, studying the Bible, and reflecting deeply upon how scripture relates to us, then some of God's wisdom will not grow within us; if we are lax in cultivating a deep relationship with God, then we are going to miss out on some of the power, and grace, and love, and joy that God wants us to receive

my prayer today is that all of us will grow more and more as thoughtful, prayerful, and action-oriented Christians, so that Jesus will be better and better known and believed, here, in our hometown