

## The Jesus We Know

Proper 9, Year B – Mark 5:22--43

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson July 8, 2012*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

The whole town of Nazareth must have been in an uproar when the news got spread that Jesus was coming home. If such a thing had existed back then, there would have been a huge banner hung across the main street into town: “Nazareth Welcomes Jesus!” If there had been a switchboard, it would have been swamped with the chatter about all his exploits and about his homecoming. If the invention of newspapers wasn’t eighteen hundred years into the future, the Nazareth Daily would have been topped with the headline: “Local Boy Makes It Big” or: “Young Rabbi Returns from Successful Tour” or: “Popular Prophet to Proclaim.”

The people of Nazareth had heard about all the big doings up in Capernaum and on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. They had heard that he had been casting out demons. They had heard that he had been healing all manner of diseases and deformities. Lepers were being made clean. Withered hands were being made whole. Paralytics were walking away from visits to Jesus, carrying the bed on which they had been carried in. Sure, there were those rumors that he ate with tax collectors and that he was none too careful in his observance of the Sabbath. But they had heard about his calming of the wind and the waves, about the incident of the demons and the pigs, about his raising Jarius’s daughter from the dead. They had heard that the hometown hero had become quite the learned teacher, quite the dynamic preacher, quite the worker of signs and wonders. And now he was coming home. Finally, something good *had* come out of Nazareth. Finally, Nazareth had something going for it. Finally, Nazareth would *be* something.

For his first Sabbath back home, the local synagogue was completely booked. Every seat was filled by the most important, influential, learned people of the village. And every available centimeter of standing room was crammed with all the other men. People jockeyed for position from which to hear the big sensation of the area.

The service began. Prayers were said. Blessings were recited. Psalms were sung. Others took their turns in the order of things. Each stood, read a passage from the Torah or the prophets and offered their own learned comments. As each finished, quiet conversation began, polite debate about the meaning of the passage and about the reader’s commentary. Then finally came the moment everyone had come to see. Jesus stood and took up the scroll. Our lesson this morning doesn’t go into detail, but Luke tells us it was a specific passage from Isaiah proclaiming good news to the poor, release to captives and new sight to the blind. He read, he commented, and he sat back down. When he was finished, instead of being edified by his message, Mark tells us that the assembly was offended.

“Hey,” somebody said, “isn’t this guy Mary and Joseph’s boy?” “Isn’t this the kid who used to sweep up down at the carpenter shop?” “Isn’t this the same guy that used to play with my boy Daniel?” “Isn’t this the young man that used to take lessons from *us*?” “We know Jesus – where does he get off sounding so superior all of a sudden?”

The problem wasn’t that Jesus brought a message that they had never heard before. The problem wasn’t that he had no right to comment upon the Scripture. The problem wasn’t that they hadn’t heard of the power of his teaching on the Galilean hills. But coming face to face with him - hearing him with their own ears, in their own synagogue – seeing for themselves the changes in him – it just didn’t fit.

They *knew* Jesus. They knew him from their growing up together. They knew him from their studies together from the Torah. They knew him from all the previous times he had read to them from Scripture in the synagogue. The big problem, the crux of the matter, the real sticking point, was that the Jesus that they met that morning was *not* the Jesus that they knew. Instead of speaking with reverence and deference and qualification, this Jesus spoke with strength and with authority and with power. This

Jesus did not just *say* the words, he called the *reality* of those words into their midst. This Jesus challenged them to really *hear* what the Scripture was saying. He challenged them to take it not just into their heads, but into their hearts. He challenged them to do something about it other than just sit and listen. And instead of meeting that challenge, they were offended!

I wonder sometimes how much we can handle it today.

As Christians, we spend a good deal of our time, energy and emotions talking about just the sort of Jesus that the Saturday morning crowd at the Nazareth Synagogue was expecting. We know Jesus. We know him from all the stories Mom and Dad read at bedtime from the big Bible story book. We know him from the flannel-graph pictures and the colorful maps in Sunday School. We know him from seemingly countless sermons and Bible studies. And so long as we can keep our bedtime Jesus, everything is fine. So long as we can emulate his moral life and his example of prayer, everything is nice. So long as we can think of Jesus as our coffee-time friend, everything is just hunky-dory. We know Jesus. We know a Jesus who is highly polished and neatly packaged. We know a Jesus who is a great teacher, a worker of wonders, a sterling moral example. We know a Jesus who is at the ready to comfort us when we need a friend.

We know Jesus. But when it comes time to realize just how much more than that Jesus really is; when it comes time to put all his teachings into the middle of the untidy, complicated, world in which we live; when it comes time to call him “Lord,” time to accept his real authority over us, time to give him real *power* in our lives; well, then it’s a whole other matter. The minute we come face to face with the one who makes just such a claim on us, we can no longer take the easy way out. The minute we come face to face with the one who demands that we take up a cross and follow him, we can no longer just put him back on the bookshelf when the story or the study or the sermon is through. The minute we come face to face with the Eternal, changeless King of Glory, we are faced also with the claims and the demands and the challenges of his Lordship over us.

By insisting on the comfortable, cozy Jesus we know, we end up in the same poor place as the people of Nazareth at the end of our lesson this morning. Mark tells us that because of the people’s stubborn unbelief, because they clung to their own knowledge of this quiet young man from down the street, because of their steadfast refusal to see that he could be anything other than what they expected of him, Jesus did not do many deeds of power while he was with them.

If we limit our own understanding of Jesus to the kindly teacher or the trusted confidant or the gentle friend we know, we too rob ourselves, and those around us, of the real power that the Lord wants for our lives. Mark’s story this morning challenges us to do otherwise. In challenging the listeners of Nazareth, Jesus challenges us also to really *hear* the message of good news to the poor, release to captives and new sight to the blind, to take it into our hearts as well as our heads, and to get up and do something about it. The whole of the Gospel story challenges us to see the power of Christ in the life of this Jesus of Nazareth, to accept that power as the ruling force in our lives as Christians, and to rise up in the fullness of that love and grace and power to bring the message of God’s love to the needy, starving, dying world in which we live.

The only question remains, will you and I meet that challenge – or will we just be offended?