

Just a Boy From Nazareth

Year B, Proper 9 – Mark 6:1-6

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, July 5, 2015

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.

When all was said and done, he was just a boy from Nazareth. It wasn't the greatest place to be from. Shoot, even in *Galilee*, Nazareth wasn't the best place to come from. It was just an obscure little town, one of a couple hundred such little villages in that area, maybe five hundred people, and pretty much all of them living on the edge of subsistence. The people in Nazareth knew that. They knew what people from more important places said: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

They knew who this boy was, all right. He'd grown up there. It would be centuries before anyone would tell us, "It takes a village to raise a child." But if the folks in Nazareth had heard it, they would have nodded their heads in agreement. His mother, Mary, still lived there among them, as did *most* of his relatives. And there were plenty of older women there who'd also had a hand in "mothering" him. He had played in their courtyards and eaten around their fires. Their husbands remembered how he had started in early to learn his father's trade. Joseph was dead now, but there was hardly a home in Nazareth that didn't have some improvement, or some kind of furniture that Joseph or Jesus had made.

The younger men, fathers now themselves, had grown up with him. They had played together, studied Torah together, grown into manhood together. The girls, young matrons now, wouldn't have been allowed to play with the boys, but they'd noticed him, all right. They noticed all the boys, and wondered whether among them was the one who might be chosen as their future husband. They had all settled down now. They were making homes, and living their lives, and raising families of their own in Nazareth.

But Jesus had followed another path. The people in Nazareth had been hearing some strange things about him. They said he traveled around with a band of followers, preaching and teaching. They said that he had healed some sick people, and even cast out demons. They said there were some who thought he might be the long awaited Messiah. The people in Nazareth had heard all about it. But mostly, they knew better. After all, he was *just* a boy from Nazareth.

So when he got up to speak at the synagogue that Sabbath day, they weren't too surprised. He was in town visiting his mother, as well he should. And it was only natural for him to get up and speak about the scriptures. Any man of age, any *bar mitzvah*, any son of the Covenant, was *expected* to take part in the discussion. But when they heard the way *he* spoke, they were more than a little surprised. They didn't expect to hear him speak with such authority. Where was *this* coming from? This kind of wisdom couldn't come from a man *they* knew. This kind of understanding just didn't come from one who had come of age *here*. This kind of authority couldn't come from a boy whose family they all knew. It just wasn't possible – not from a boy from Nazareth.

Confronted with Jesus that day in the synagogue, the people of Nazareth had quite an opportunity. They could open their minds and hearts to believe, as the angel had said to their friend and kinswoman Mary years ago, that *nothing* would be impossible with God. They could accept that God was at work, right there in Nazareth, right there in the person of this man they knew so well. They could understand that the Kingdom of God was at hand, right there in this boy from Nazareth. Or they could *close* their minds and hearts to the reality standing right there in front of them.

And that's what most of them did. Mark writes that "they took offense at him." Who did he think he was, *after* all, this boy from Nazareth? They closed their minds. They closed their hearts. They rejected him. And *finally*, Mark says, one of the saddest lines in all the Gospel, "he was amazed at their unbelief." These were his family, his mentors, the friends of his youth. He had played with their children. He had eaten at their fires. He had shared worship with them. These were the people he loved most intimately. It wasn't that he needed their adulation, but he had so much he wanted to *give* them. He had so much he

wanted to *share* with them. But they just couldn't accept it – not from him. “Prophets are not without honor,” he shook his head, “except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” Because after all, he was just a boy from Nazareth.

Of course, sitting here with a couple of thousand years of hindsight, *we* know the rest of the story. We've read the accounts of miracles and signs and wonders. We've read the Sermon on the Mount, and we've heard the Beatitudes, and we have the Lord's Prayer pretty much *memorized*. We've seen those crosses with the inscription, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” And we know the power of the Holy Spirit, and the spread of the Church. So *we* know that the boy from Nazareth was everything he said he was. After all, here we are, sitting in church on a Sunday morning – on Fourth of July weekend, no less.

We believe in Jesus, all right. But I wonder, when it comes down to actually *doing* something about it, I wonder if we're any different than those folks at Nazareth. I wonder if we're any different, when we are called to really *believe* that the Word of God is fulfilled right here among *us*, right here within *us*. I wonder if we're any different when Jesus asks *us* to believe that “*nothing* will be impossible with God,” that *nothing* is impossible in our lives, that *nothing* is impossible in our community, that *nothing* is impossible in our church.

You see, it is all too easy for us to fall into the same trap as they did in Nazareth. It's all too easy to say, “That couldn't happen here.” “We're too small, too old, too young, too busy.” “That might happen somewhere else, but not here.” And so our own fear, and our own doubt, and our own pride can prevent *us* from accepting the power of God in our lives, from accepting it in the life of our Parish. The people of Nazareth made their choice, and it is recorded that, “he could do no deed of power there...”

We here at St. Paul's, we here in this community, we here in this nation that we celebrate this weekend, have done and continue to do great things.

But what would happen if we chose to open our minds and our hearts to the absolute reality of Christ's grace? What would happen if we chose to open ourselves completely to the reality of Jesus Christ's authority over *all* our life? What would happen if we chose to open our suppers, and our committee meetings, and our worship, and our budgets, to the power of Jesus to do the work in us that he *wants* from us, to do the work in us that he *wants for* us? What would happen if we prayed, not just, “Lord, we believe,” but also, “Lord, help our *unbelief*”?

I was supposed to use our Epistle lesson for preaching this morning. I had intended to say something about our strength coming from the very weakness that God sanctifies by our dependence on his grace alone. But then I got to thinking about the call of our Presiding Bishop-elect to live into a new Jesus movement, and I got to wondering what might just happen, walking along side that boy from Nazareth.