

The Jesus We Thought We Knew

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

Thomas Wolfe wrote a well-known novel titled, 'You Can't Go Home Again'... the book is about an author named George Webber who (in the story) has written a successful book of his own (about his hometown) - (that brings about not only national recognition but also plenty of fame and notoriety as well)...

And yet, what's interesting about the story is that when he actually does return home he's met with some very unhappy residents (who feel that Webber has not only portrayed them in a bad light - but they also accuse him of distorting the image of their beloved town)... in fact, tensions run so high that he receives not only menacing letters (but a few death threats as well) - reminding the reader that some of our harshest critics (are the ones - closest to home) - thus, the title - 'You Can't Go Home Again'...

I share that story with you because this is what seems to be happening to Jesus in our Gospel lesson this morning... in fact, preceding our Lord's return to his own hometown of Nazareth (Mark tells us that Jesus had also gained plenty of fame and notoriety himself)

- for healing Peter's mother-in-law, for instance... for healing a leper, a paralyzed man, another man with a deformity, for calming the storm and the sea, for raising a young girl from the dead, and for healing another woman we spoke about last week (who bled for 12 long years)...

And yet, what's interesting about our story this morning is that when Jesus returns home to Nazareth (he's not met with respect and admiration like the crowds were giving him in other places along the way) but he's met with suspicion, with doubt, and some of the harshest critics of all...

But the question is 'why'?

Well, I can remember my own homecoming of returning to Long Island after finishing seminary to hang out with my best friend, Frank... Now I've known Frank since we were both 4 years old (and needless to say, he knows *everything there is to know about me*)... in fact, I was friends with Frank when I kissed my first girlfriend - drank my first beer - skipped Sunday School (once or twice to hang out with some of the cool kids in town) - and everything else *that only* best friends would know about each other...

And I'll always remember sitting across from him at a diner one night (and hearing him say - with a puzzled look on his face, "*I still can't believe you're a pastor!*")... As if to say, "*I knew you back when...*" when you were young, naïve, and foolish...

Which makes it hard at times for people who know us best to be overly impressed with *who we might have become...* because these are people (who also know *where we've come from*)...

I think this is why those who come to listen to Jesus speak (in his hometown synagogue) are equally confused at what they're hearing... in fact, it tells us that they wonder where he got such wisdom... and how it could be possible that "*such a man*" can do "*such deeds of power*"...

And they wondered this because when Jesus lived in town (for about 30 years) he was just a carpenter - (a 'blue collar' worker) - a common person like everyone else in town who worked with their hands (and he had no formal training as a rabbi)...

"And who was he" they must have wondered, "to tell us how to live?"...

And what further confused the townsfolk was our Lord's family of origin... in fact, most scholars agree that it was not only unusual in Jesus' day (but also quite disparaging) to describe a man as the *son of his mother* - as they do in verse 3, asking, "*Isn't this the Son of Mary?*" (rather than asking if he was the 'Son of Joseph')... perhaps this is why William Barclay writes, "*Rumors to the effect that Jesus was illegitimate (appear to have circulated in his own lifetime) - and may lie behind this reference as well*"...

And perhaps that's why they say, 'familiarity breeds contempt' because all they could see in Jesus was a simple carpenter from a broken family (which causes them to not only reject his message) but it prevents them from seeing Jesus in all his fulness... which is why it also tells us that - "*Jesus could do no deeds of power*" - for those who thought they knew him - (best of all) ...

because of the pride that filled their hearts
Perhaps it's true - sometimes you can't go home again

You know, as I spent some time this week thinking about Jesus returning home (and being rejected by his own people - because of the assumptions they were making about him) - it made me wonder if we also limit Jesus in some ways (with some of our own assumptions)...

And what I mean by that is, so often we don't expect to hear him speak to us (because we've grown too comfortable telling him what to do) that we fail to hear his voice...

Or, even though we might have heard stories of how Jesus has changed the lives of many (but because some of us struggle to believe that he would do the same for us) we don't find our lives transformed...

Or because we struggle to believe in his miracles (we also fail to see them) – and because of our lack of faith in his power (we also fail to see his glory in our lives)...

And aren't we also rejecting our Lord – (like they did in Nazareth) - when we find ourselves ashamed to talk about him with others – or when we keep our faith to ourselves (as our best kept secret) – or we feel offended when we're asked to give of ourselves, or get more involved, or even speak up (when occasions arise)?...

And it's not that we don't know Lord (in fact, like it was for those who lived in Nazareth – many of us have known him our whole lives)... but what I think our Gospel story is trying to remind us of – is that when we limit Jesus (or grow too comfortable in what we think we know about him) – we not only limit what he can do *in our lives*) but even more importantly – we limit what he can do *with our lives*...

This is why we are reminded in Proverbs 3:5, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; but in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight”* ...

Or why it tells us in Psalm 9:10, *“And those who know your name put ALL their trust in you... for you, O LORD, have not forsaken - those who seek you.”*

And why the prophet reminds us in Jeremiah 17:7, *“Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD”* ... (and notice that it doesn't say, *“trust what we know of the Lord”* but it says, *“Whose trust IS IN the Lord”* (who can show us new and exciting things)...

So I want to close with something I read a few months ago in my morning devotion (that reminds me of this thought) about a man named Arthur Burns (who happened to be the chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board during the 1970s)... Burns, who was Jewish, became part of a Bible study that was held at the White

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House at the time... And one day, those in the group listened in surprise as Burns prayed out loud, "*O God, may the day come when all Jews will know Jesus.*"

But an even bigger surprise came when he prayed - for the time "*when all Christians will come - to know Jesus.*"...

Friends, what I love about that story is that (yes, it could be taken as an insult if we let pride get in the way) – but if it's not an insult it serves to remind each and everyone of us that there is always so much more that we can know about Jesus... so much more we can learn, and discover, and grow to love (on our journey through life)... perhaps even be inspired by, made excited once again, or simply be ignited by his presence – as long as we set our pride aside (and let Jesus make his home - in our hearts)... the only place he wants to be...

May we open our hearts to our Lord this morning.... May he fill us with the Spirit of Love and Truth.... And may we always make room for our god...

In Jesus' name we pray...

Amen!