

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 4, 2021, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:1-6

***"The Best Was Yet to Come"***

Once again, Happy Fourth of July! I am sure you have heard the saying, "you can't go home again?" It is the title of a book, written by Thomas Wolfe, and published in 1940. I think it is funny that at one time that might have been true – but in today's age of social media, you can visit old friends and places with just a few keystrokes. During the pandemic we at the church were suddenly introduced to things like ZOOM, or Facebook Live – and even FaceTime for visits with family and old friends across many miles.

I started thinking about during the fight for independence for this country, and about the men, women, children, and families that could never go home again. They said goodbye to Great Britain in order to begin this fight for freedom, and they could no longer go home again. I had never thought of that before. I had always thought that it was put on their hearts, and they went out with their muskets and so on, but more than that - they lost a lot. The cost of freedom is and was very great.

For me – every time I had gone back to my childhood home, on Long Island, New York, I found it just was not the same – while visiting with people was always typically great – but the expense of the travel and connections made it hard to do over and over. For me I will hold onto the treasured memories and rely on the electronic media to stay in touch. For me it is hard to go home again.

Jesus grew up in the very small town called Nazareth – in the northern part of the Galilee region of Israel. Nazareth was never even mentioned in the Old Testament and it was believed to be about the size of a football field with no more than 150 residents. There were no tall towers or structures there. It was your typical "hometown." It was not unlike Douglas, where everyone is either related or knows something about you. One of Jesus' Apostles named Nathanael, who was also called Bartholomew, came from the nearby village of Cana where Jesus changed the water into wine – and he said this about Nazareth in John 1:46, "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*" Small town rivalries to say the least.

Shortly after being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, early in His three-year ministry, Jesus returned home to Nazareth. In Luke chapter 4, Jesus visited the synagogue where He grew up and went there on the Sabbath. He read from the scroll of Isaiah 61 – and told them that those words that He read were "*fulfilled in your hearing.*" (Luke 4:21) Imagine sitting in that synagogue and hearing that the words that you just heard were now being fulfilled in your hearing, in other words – I am the Messiah!" They were amazed – and surprised at what they heard – but even more importantly, they were surprised at who they were hearing it from! Jesus was not alone on this visit – accompanied by His apostles and disciples.

Today's Holy Gospel is from Mark, chapter 6, and verse 2 tells us, "*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? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?" (Mark 6:2)*

They are seeing this grown man right in front of them – speaking with confidence, clarity, authority, and wisdom – and they were comparing Him with the little boy they once knew – who grew up before their very eyes. In verse 3 – you can see how they are trying to connect the dots – out loud, saying, *"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.*" (Mark 6:3) Hang on for a second – that is not why they took offense with Him. We will get to that in a minute. They thought they knew everything there was to know about this young Man – but apparently, they did not. Because they could not make the full connection, they took offense with Him. The original Greek says: καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ. (*Kai eskandalizonto hen autow*) which means *"and it caused them to stumble over Him"* They were at a total loss – it knocked them flat – they just could not believe what they were hearing or who they were hearing it from.

Jesus knew what was racing through their minds and He addressed their confusion in verse 4 by saying: *"A Prophet is not without honor except in His own town, among His relatives and in His own home."* Even Jesus' own brothers could not fully accept His divinity until after His Resurrection – the Apostle John tells us in his Gospel of John 7:5 – *"For even his own brothers did not believe in him."* Even Mark gives this account in Mark 3:20-21 – *"Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him."* It must have been quite difficult growing up alongside Jesus. It is however, very moving to hear James refer to his brother as *"our glorious Lord Jesus Christ."* (James 2:1). James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. It was not until Jesus' Resurrection and His appearance to James and the disciples that James finally understood who his half-brother really was – the Son of God.

I have told you many times before that the key to heaven is belief. There were so many times that Jesus healed people, freed them from demons, raised people from the dead – and He said that by their faith – by their belief they were healed. Peter started to walk on the water – but doubted and started to sink into the Sea of Galilee. Who saved him? Jesus saved him! Matthew, who was in the boat – wrote in Matthew 14:31, *"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'"* Jesus does not reward disbelief or doubt. He told the Apostles, *"I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."* (Mark 11:23-24)

As is mentioned in today's Holy Gospel from Mark 6:5 – *"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith."* I have told you that Jesus did not heal people to prove who He was – Jesus healed

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because they genuinely believed who He was and where the power was coming from. He did not heal to prove anything – especially in His own hometown.

When you lay out the facts – the truth is undeniable – that Jesus gave of Himself in a way that others might see and believe. When you believe in Jesus as Lord – a transformation takes place that wipes out disbelief – and you are changed forever. Remember what Jesus told Jairus, in last week's Gospel – when He raised his daughter from the dead? Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid – just believe!*" (Mark 5:36)

I need to share with you from Luke's Gospel regarding the lack of belief in Nazareth. Remember it said that they were upset with Him? Let me share with you why they were upset with Him. After reading the reading from Isaiah 61 – Jesus addressed how God was reaching out to Gentiles, as well as Jews – expressing how the Prophet Elisha had a hand in cleansing Naaman the Syrian from Leprosy. He told him to go bathe on the Jordan seven times. When he finally gave up and did – he was healed. Luke wrote that, "*All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*" (Luke 4:28-30) That was not neighborly at all! Can you imagine, coming back to visit friends and family, and folks getting upset because you were telling the truth?

Just in case you were wondering – it was apparent that they were not ready for what would come in less than three years. They witnessed a miracle of God's protection, but they did not get it – He walked right through the crowd and they could not touch Him. These were the same people that said, "*Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon?*" (Mark 6:3) They were not ready, but the truth is - the best was yet to come!