

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 5, 2015, Year B

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:1-6

***"Home Again?"***

If you are like me, and have moved away from the place of your youth, you have fond memories of that place, that town, and most likely of the people as well. Nazareth, was the place where the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. And for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."* (Luke 1:35) Nazareth, today is a lot different than it was in Jesus' day, when it was a small town on a hillside, about the size of a football field. You could fit the town in the High School stadium, as all the houses were close together, in northern Galilee, where I am sure everyone knew what was going on in each other's caves. Everyone knew everyone. For all intents and purposes, Jesus was home, among friends, possibly relatives and neighbors, and the news about Him apparently had preceded Him.

About 13 years ago, just before heading to seminary, my family – my wife Marilyn, our son John Eric and daughter Theresa and I flew back to Long Island from Jacksonville, to spend an extended vacation in our "old stomping grounds," eighteen days amongst friends, relatives and neighbors. Eighteen days to see how things had changed, the woods with the trees where we built tree forts were gone – now there were condos – and parking lots. The homes where we grew up had changed at the hands of new owners. Our first house didn't look the same either, and the neighborhood seemed somewhat distant. Then only about ten years had elapsed since we lived on Long Island, but something was **very different**. I was not the same person who had lived there, and been on the radio on Long Island. It was different - everything that had seemed so big; way back then, was much smaller now. When I was little we could ride our bicycles – we could do that in those days for about a mile or so, and nobody had to worry. But then again, that was the 1950's. I was not the same person who moved away from there in 1991. Maybe it's because I am bigger, with a whole different perspective.

When Jesus returned to His old hometown – He was different from what they remembered. He wasn't just another synagogue preacher, telling people how to obey God's law, offering God's hope for the future, explaining from the prophets something about when the kingdom might come. He was saying, on His own authority, that the kingdom of God was coming, right then and there. Where He was, the kingdom was and He was doing things that demonstrated it. But in Nazareth, this city only as big as a football field – was filled with doubt. The people had heard what Jesus had done in Capernaum and around the shore of the Sea of Galilee; and now they were challenging Him to do the very same back home where everyone knew Him. I think that there was more to it than just putting the 'local boy made good' in His place. The kind of kingdom Jesus was talking about was not what they expected. If you would please turn with me to page 1564 of our Pew Bible to Mark chapter 6; let's look at verses 2 and 3. *"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 that He even does miracles!" "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.*" When the people of Nazareth had an excuse for rejecting Jesus - they went for it! They could easily dismiss Him as 'Oh, he's just the carpenter.' As if that really made any difference. Jesus is indeed the one who can fix all things with just a word, the one who has come to put the world back in order. We can clearly see the mysterious connection between healing and faith. Lack of faith, we are told seriously hinders Jesus' power; and that is an important lesson for us all. If even Jesus was thwarted by the unbelief of those around Him, we shouldn't be surprised if sometimes we don't seem able to do what we thought we should do. Mark's Gospel points us towards the time when Jesus came to the city the Messiah might think of as home, to the Temple where a Messiah ought to go, and was once again rejected, this time with fatal consequences. This glimpse of Jesus' family reminds us that He had many blood-relatives who would be important in the life of the early church. Jesus seems to have come from a large family, the Gospel lists a whole bunch of name, the most famous of these brothers is James, to whom Jesus appeared after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7) and who became the great leader in the Jerusalem church, the sort of anchorman of early Christianity while Peter and Paul were off on their travels around the world. However, James, at this stage, shared the general unbelief of Nazareth. Within 30 years his name would be known throughout the church, and across the world, synonymous with faithful and persistent teaching and prayer – and loyalty to his older brother, Jesus the Messiah. James would go on to be the author of the Epistle of James. I am sure you have heard "*faith without deeds (works) is dead.*" (James 2:26) Our works are not about earning heaven, but our works are because of the faith we have in Jesus – to do for others. We have so many examples of faithful Christians – right here in these pews – and I don't need to name you – because it is all of you! On July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend – you are in church! There are other people in other places, and that is ok – but faithfulness speaks volumes.

Jesus addresses this air of doubt that persists in His old hometown. "*Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor."*" When you think about it – not much has changed even to today as huge corporations often bring in "outside consultants" to help with problem solving, while right in the midst of them are probably knowledgeable and capable people who might be able to accomplish the same result with less cost or effort.

There are other accounts in the Gospels of this visit to Nazareth; in Luke chapter 4, and Matthew chapter 13. In each of these accounts the people of Nazareth lacked faith but Jesus refused to just walk away and give up on them. He didn't perform a great number of miracles there – but He did perform some as we can see in verses 5-6. There is a lot more about Jesus' visit to Nazareth that we need to seek from Luke's Gospel in chapter 4. Please turn with me in your Pew Bibles to page 1598, Luke 4. Jesus was called to read from the Scriptures in the Synagogue that day from Isaiah 61. Let's look at those words in Luke 4:18-21. Jesus read "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*" "*Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue*

*were fastened on him," "and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.""*

Can you just imagine? In effect - Jesus was telling the people of Nazareth – the Jewish people - that God's salvation was offered equally to all of humanity, not just the people of Israel. Jesus was identifying Himself – as He told the people that in their listening to Him speak that what they heard was being fulfilled! Throughout history the Israelites unfaithfulness to the covenant had angered God, (that is why they wandered 40 years in the wilderness) and He now would expand His New Covenant through Jesus. This was too much for the Jewish people in the synagogue that day, for they absolutely hated the Gentiles. And they hated what Jesus was telling them. Yahweh was their God and they were His chosen people. Verses 28-30 of Luke 4 tells us *"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."* That is a miracle in itself. Amazingly, Jesus was removing the boundaries, and they didn't like it, enough to try and throw one of their own off the cliff. Miraculously, nothing was going to stop what God had planned for all of humanity, for Jesus' ministry and mission. By the power of God almighty - Jesus supernaturally walked away, totally and completely unscathed.

We know as followers of Jesus Christ, that it is through His death on the cross that Jesus carried out His promise of salvation to all people, Jew and Gentile alike. His offer is made to each one of us, and all we need to do is to accept it. Thank God we live in a place where we are free to accept Jesus as our Messiah and the Lord of our lives. He wants us to come to Him just as we are, warts and all, repenting and submitting to His transforming love, so that we may spend eternity with Him in our eternal hometown. Please turn with me one more time in your Pew Bible to John chapter 3, beginning with verse 16 on page 1651 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."* We can add to that – when we repent – we are forgiven! That is the best part. There is no other faith in this world – in this universe that believes in forgiveness. When we come before God and say “I messed up, Lord, and I am sorry...” – it is like one of those old Magic Slates we had when we were kids – it is written all over it – but God just lifts it up and it is gone. What sin? You see, Jesus went to the cross. He went to the cross to pay the debt that we had – and people don't get it! All you need is Jesus! It is not “All You Need Is Love.” Jesus is love – all you need is Jesus in your heart. It is interesting - I was watching this video from “America's Got Talent.” This little girl, a little black girl came out; she looked like Shirley Temple. Amazingly, she was going to tap dance and sing. She did an amazing job, and Howard

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Stern said to her “my goodness, you seem to have the spirit of Shirley Temple in you!” She said “not Shirley Temple --- Jesus! On national TV – you go girl! That’s what it is all about.

God’s promise is not selective but is for all people – and it is the choice – the free will of those people to accept His promise and spend eternity in His presence - or to reject it – and face the judgment of your own righteousness, and not the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The promise that Jesus made is that when we stand before the Father , if we believe in Him, as He said in John 3:16 – God does not see our unrighteousness. He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ, because our unrighteousness has been covered. Covered by what? The Blood of Jesus! There is nothing on the face of this earth that cannot be forgiven, short of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. There is nothing that cannot be forgiven by the Blood of Jesus, by His sacrifice on the cross. And so the choice is clear and it will determine whether or not you are going home. The choice is yours!