

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 8, 2018, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:1-6

"The Power of Belief"

There is a lot to be said about going home. You usually have a lot of memories and experiences that you either love to recall or maybe some you really want to forget! They say home is where the heart is – but that can open a real can of worms, for some. For me – my home is no longer mine. The house where my three sisters and I grew up doesn't look anything like what I remember. It has been drastically changed - the whole roof is laden with solar panels and the shake shingles have been replaced with siding and the color of the paint is drastically different. For me it is just a building. Marilyn's old house, where she lived with her Mom and Dad has also been renovated. You would not recognize it. The same can be said for the area where we grew up. Homes have been built with a shoehorn – squeezing them into every available space, with hardly any property in between, Traffic is heavy all the time – and not just at 'rush hour.' It is funny – four years ago this month we were shown around town by Don, the head of the search committee and George Blampied, also on the search committee. At one point there was a bunch of cars at a stop light – and someone said "ah, rush hour!" I grew up in New York and some of you have been to Atlanta – rush hour there is nothing like Douglas. I will take Douglas, thank you very much!

I could go on about the other places we lived over the years: Marilyn and my first house. A year after we got married we moved out of our garden apartment into a beautiful home – where John took his first steps, our second home almost two hours to the north in a more rural area where Theresa toddled. Then in 1994 the move to the South – to Jacksonville – and the list goes on. All filled with memories – not just ours – but there are others who remember us. In each place I made connections with people through my radio shows – and when we moved to Jacksonville I wasn't seeking to do a radio show – but they knew I was there – and they came courtin' as you might say. My reputation preceded me. Word does get around.

Jesus grew up in the town of Nazareth – in the northern part of the Galilee region – to the southwest of the Sea of Galilee. It was overshadowed by other surrounding places, especially the pagan city Sepphoris, and interestingly enough, Nazareth was never even mentioned in the Old Testament. It was believed to be about the size of a football field and probably had no more than 150 residents. 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 had this to say about Nazareth in John 1:46, "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*" Sort of like Waycross talking about Coffee County, or vice versa.

It was to Nazareth that Jesus returned to, after being tempted by Satan in the wilderness – very early in His three-year ministry. He had been baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist and immediately went into the Judean Wilderness, where He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and then was tempted by Satan. From there He returned home. In Luke chapter 4, Jesus returned to the synagogue where He grew up and went there on the Sabbath. He read from the scroll of Isaiah 61 – and told them that the words that He read were "*fulfilled in your hearing.*"

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(Luke 4:21) Can you just imagine sitting on that synagogue and hearing that the words that you just heard were fulfilled in your hearing, meaning that “I’m the Guy!” They were amazed – and surprised at what they were hearing – but more importantly – who they were hearing it from! Jesus was not alone on this visit – accompanied by His disciples. Please open your Pew Bibles to page 1564 – and Mark Chapter 6.

We know that Jesus was in Nazareth, and as 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) Pretty amazing!

I have heard from many people about a famous personality who was born in Douglas and has gone on to musical stardom, even performing in the musical Chicago on Broadway. There are some here today that either went to school with her or may even have been one of her teachers in Coffee County Schools. She performed the National Anthem at H. S. Football games and ironically did a duet with Jon BonJovi in 2005 called “Who Says You Can’t Go Home Again.” I am sure that many here today have heard or could tell stories about Jennifer Nettles – who comes from Douglas. Sort of like the people in the synagogue in Nazareth who remembered this young man and could probably tell stories - their amazement was warranted – because they had probably never seen Jesus in this kind of role growing up.

They are seeing this man right in front of them – speaking with confidence, clarity, authority and wisdom – and they were trying to process this in comparison with the little boy they once knew. Looking at verse 3 – you can see how they are trying to connect the dots – out loud. “*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) They thought they knew everything there was to know about this young Man – but apparently, they didn’t. They worked through the people and relationships in their thoughts and their minds and they spoke it out loud – and yet because they couldn’t work it out – they took offense with Him. Actually, I looked at the original Greek which says: *καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ.* (*Kai eskandalizontow hen autow*) which means “and it caused them to stumble over Him” They were at a total loss – it knocked them flat – they couldn’t believe what they were hearing and who they were hearing it from. They were at a total loss over Jesus with His true identity shining through.

Jesus knows what is racing through their minds and He addresses 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’ brothers couldn’t fully accept His divinity until after His Resurrection – the Apostle John tells us in the 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, for they said, "He is out of his mind."*” It must have been very difficult growing up alongside Jesus with faults and

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sin and seeing perfection growing up in your house. If you have brothers or sisters, you may understand about rivalries – how one does one thing well, and one doesn't. They compare – always looking at one another. It is moving to hear James refer to his brother as “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” (James 2:1). Can you imagine what this phrase must have meant for James? The Lord of glory had once slept beside him, ate at his dinner table, played with his friends, spoke to him like a brother, endured his unbelief, paid the debt of his sin, and then brought him to faith. It may have taken years of faithful, prayerful witness by the Son of God, but the miracle occurred: his brothers believed. James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. It wasn't until Jesus' resurrection and His appearance to James and the disciples that James finally really understood who his half-brother was.

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? Matthew, who was in the boat - recorded this event 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) We are human, and we are always susceptible to that tiny little mustard seed of doubt in our hearts. Only He can help us to remove that – by having faith in Him, having belief in Him,

In today's Gospel reading 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.”* Jesus did not heal people as a sign of who He was or to prove who He was – Jesus healed because people truly believed who He was and where the power was coming from. They believed in His divinity as the only Son of God, who came to save believers. If people believed as a result of His miracles – then that's great – but He did not “perform” to prove anything – especially in His own home town. I truly have a problem with people saying He “performed.” The only thing I can think of is “tada!” He didn't perform – He gave miracles as a gift, as a sign of His love, as a sign of the faith of the person who received that miracle. He didn't “do” miracles to prove anything – especially in His own home town.

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 we are changed forever. You have got to agree – He cleans us up pretty nicely. It doesn't make us perfect – but He also gave us the gift of reconciliation – where we can meet Him and tell Him our sins and know that they are gone. Making us as white as snow!

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Our Vacation Bible School, which starts tomorrow night at 6 PM is about the transforming love of Jesus Christ shining through us to the world. It is for all ages – toddlers to adults. We will be singing a song called “Shine” by a Christian Band called the Newsboys. Their songs’ chorus is “Shine, make ‘em wonder whatcha got – make ‘em wish that they were not on the outside looking bored.” “Shine – let it shine before all men – let ‘em see good works and then let ‘em glorify the Lord!” The biggest word that people are afraid of is in the Christian language begins with an E – Evangelism. It shocks and frightens people. We will be talking about an evangelism that is contrary to the image that is out there.

Standing on the street corner screaming ‘the end is near! Banging on a Bible – “you need to have the Word of God” and of course the big question – “if you were to die tonight do you know where you would end up?” ‘You do not need to knock people over the head to show your belief; you do not need to get into great debates to share your belief; you do not need to quote Scripture to show your belief; you just need to as Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 – “*let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*” Last week we talked about Jesus and Jairus – the leader of the synagogue who came to Him and said my daughter is dying – if you could just come and touch her – she will be healed. Jesus’ response to him, when they got to his home and they were told that she was dead – Jesus turned to him and said, “*Do not be afraid – just believe!*” (Mark 5:36)