

JESUS KNOWS WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH

Mark 6:1-6 | Seventh Sunday after Pentecost | July 5/8, 2018

Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home."

Juva, Jesu!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

An episode of M*A*S*H came to mind as I was studying the portion of God's Word before us today. In it a soldier receives a terrible leg wound. The damage is so great that his leg has to be amputated. This particular soldier also happens to be a star running back for the University of Iowa football team. When he finds out his leg is gone and his football career over, he doesn't think life is worth living any more. In one scene Hawkeye tells him, "I know how you feel." The soldier immediately and angrily replies, "No you don't! You can't possibly know!" He was right. Hawkeye is a surgeon. He did many amputations. But he never lost a leg himself. He could *sympathize* with that soldier. But he couldn't *empathize* with him. He didn't really know what that soldier was going through.

That, of course, is fiction. But the idea it conveys is true. Someone who hasn't experienced what we have experienced just doesn't know what we're going through. Jesus does. He knows all too well what we, his followers, are going through each and every day. He knows what it's like to be rejected for what you believe, teach and confess. He knows what it's like to be looked down on by his own family.

I. He Was Rejected for His Teaching

Last week we heard the account of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. After that astounding miracle, Jesus and his disciples traveled to his hometown, Nazareth. On Saturday, the Sabbath, they went to church—the synagogue. The synagogue service wasn't all that different from our worship services. They prayed. They sang hymns—the book of Psalms was their hymnal. They listened to Scripture readings. And they heard a sermon. The sermon, just like ours, was based on a text from the Scriptures. Unlike our custom it wasn't preached by the local pastor but by a guest rabbi. And on this day his hometown synagogue invited him to be the guest preacher.

We would expect this to have been a joyful homecoming. You can almost read the headline in the *Nazareth News*: "Local Boy Makes Good." Sadly, the people of Jesus' hometown didn't exactly welcome him with open arms. After the service there was no "Nice to have you back," or "Thanks for your message." They had nothing but questions: **"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? ³ 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.

There's an old saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." I am reminded of John's words in the first chapter of his Gospel: **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him** (11). The worshippers on that Sabbath Saturday knew Jesus as their former neighbor. They knew him as the son of Mary and, so they thought, Joseph. They knew him as the carpenter. They could accept all these things. But they refused to accept his teaching. Even his miracles couldn't convince them that Jesus was who he claimed to be—the promised Messiah. That was most certainly the message of his synagogue sermon.

Jesus was rejected in Nazareth another time. This was what he preached: **"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."** That passage from Isaiah is about the promised Messiah. After reading it Jesus said: **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"** (Luke 4:18-21). Jesus read the text and then announced the theme: I am the one Isaiah was talking about. I am the promised Savior of the world. The people rejected his message that time too. In fact, they even tried to throw him off a cliff.

None of us have ever literally been

pushed to the edge of a cliff because of our Christian confession. That's a good thing. Unless it's because we Christians aren't always doing a very good job of confessing. Sometimes we aren't rejected for what we believe because people don't hear us confessing what we believe

Here's what I mean:

- Do our words always make clear that we are followers of the Word made flesh, or would they sometimes be more appropriate for dirty joke time in the break room?
- Do our neighbors see us faithfully leaving for church on Thursday evening or Sunday morning, or do they see us packing up for the lake or the campground most weekends in the summer?
- Do we seize every opportunity to share the truth with others, or do we normally avoid that uncomfortable situation as if to say, "Whatever you believe is fine—I don't want to bother you"?
- Are we known in our neighborhoods for being kind, compassionate and caring toward others? Or do we often come across as just a disinterested and uncaring as the rest of the world?

You know, sometimes people reject Jesus and his message because they can't stomach his followers. Paul wrote: **Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God** (1 Cor. 10:31). Sometimes we do just the opposite. Too often our lives don't draw

people to the Savior. They drive them away.

Jesus knows what we're going through. I don't mean Jesus knows what it is to sin. He never did. But he knows what it is to be tempted. **We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin** (Hebrews 4:15).

There's the difference. Jesus never sinned. And what a wonderful difference this makes for us. In that synagogue Jesus proclaimed himself as the promised Savior. That he is. Jesus is our perfect substitute. He never failed to glorify God in all that he did. He obeyed perfectly in our place. He was without sin. But this Sinless One allowed himself to be numbered with us sinners. He allowed himself to be hammered to a cross and sealed in a tomb because of our offenses against God. His divine blood paid for every last one. And his resurrection put the exclamation point on his words: **"It is finished!"** (John 19:30). Our enemy is defeated. Our sin is forgiven. Our eternity is secure.

It was for this message that the hometown Nazareth crowd rejected Jesus. My friends, when we are rejected for our faith, Jesus knows just how we feel. And he knows how to help. He gives us this promise: **"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"** (Matthew 28:20). Through his Word and Supper Jesus is with us to strengthen our

faith and empower our witness in a sin-darkened world. Yes, we will be rejected and dishonored for our Christian faith. But we'll never face this rejection alone.

You know, there's one kind of rejection that hurts more than most—being rejected by your own family.

II. He Was Dishonored by His Family

Seven centuries before Jesus' birth Isaiah wrote about him: **He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not** (53:3). A good little summary of the kind of life Jesus lived. It wasn't a life of popularity. It was a life of rejection.

One of the greatest sorrows of Jesus' life was being rejected by his brothers and sisters—his own family. Yes, Jesus had brothers and sisters. Who were they? We have no reason to doubt that they were the biological children of Mary and Joseph, born after Jesus' virgin birth. So actually they were Jesus' half-brothers and sisters. Well, these half brothers and sisters thought Jesus was more than half crazy. **"He's out of his mind"** they once said about him (Mark 3:21). John tells us that **even his own brothers did not believe in him** (7:5). How sad!

But later on, after Jesus' resurrection, things changed. In 1 Corinthians his brothers are mentioned prominently in a list of other believers, including the apostle Peter (9:5). And we know that Jesus' brother James became a great pillar

of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9).

My friends, this is encouraging. Families are often split into two groups: believers and unbelievers (Matthew 10:34-36). Most of us have family members who are not Christian, or who are very weak in their faith. They often reject us for our Christian faith and our Christian way of life. When you speak against a brother's immoral lifestyle or a sister's lack of church attendance or a son's abuse of alcohol, you can suddenly become pretty unpopular. You begin to receive the blame for the family not getting along. Someone might even say, "Who do you think you are, Mr. Perfect? You're just as bad as the rest of us."

But, my friends, don't give up hope. Jesus' family rejected him at first too. Later they put their trust in him as their only Savior. The same can happen in your family. So keep on proclaiming the Word. Keep speaking God's law and gospel. Keep on telling your family about the Savior. Keep on sharing the good news. That gospel is **the power of God that brings salvation** (Romans 1:16). Your brother may reject God's Word and tell you to quit preaching to him. But you never know when the Spirit is going to use that message to change his heart, to turn him around, to bring him to repentance and faith. What a happy occasion it is when a wandering soul returns to the Lord! Jesus put it this way: **"I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"** (Luke 15:10). For us the joy is multiplied when that repentant sinner is a member of our own family.

"I know how you feel." That's annoying when the person saying doesn't really know what you're going through. But when it comes from our Savior's heart, what a comfort! Jesus really does know what we are going through. And the One who's been there-done that, promises to be with us always. Amen.

S.D.G.