

Mark 6:1-13

6:1 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.

6:2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!

6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

6:4 Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."

6:5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.

6:6 And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.

6:7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

6:8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts;

6:9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

6:10 He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place.

6:11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."

6:12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent.

6:13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Omaha, I have enjoyed the wonderful cuisine I have eaten since I arrived on Thursday. I had some good Mexican food and some good ice cream and some good falafel. And then my wife and daughter and I spent all day on Friday at the Omaha Zoo. We rode the train and we touched the stingrays and had encounters with butterflies.

The highlight of my time here in Nebraska has been celebrating 50 years of Power – 50 years of reuniting the children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren and great-great grandchildren and great-great-great grandchildren of Roger and Corena Power. My ancestors.

But I have to tell you this.

I cannot stay here.

I cannot stay here because the bed I have slept in the past few nights is sinking sand. My back is killing me.

AirBnBs can be nice, reasonably-priced. But there is no place like home.

I love good food. I love my family.

But there is no place like home.

I realized yesterday that I have been traveling so much for work recently that I been home for 7 nights straight since May 12.

No offense, but I gotta get home, y'all.

To my own bed.

Because there's no place quite like home.

Jesus found that out the hard way.

He had been on the road, teaching and preaching. He had spent his energy rescuing a tormented man who lived among the tombs and healing a woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years and resurrecting a little girl who had died before he could get there.

The text says that Jesus and his disciples went to Nazareth. He wasn't necessarily there to go off the grid. He wasn't taking vacation days from ministry.

But perhaps Jesus thought he could BE healed by the comforts of home while he did more healing.

I can imagine that he wanted to just be with his folk. That he longed to see some people he knew by name in the crowd.

I imagine that he thought he could be nourished by the chance to do ministry at his home synagogue, in front of his family and friends.

But when you've been away for a while, all the folks at home have to go on is word on the street.

The people at home had heard about Jesus. About his prophetic sermons. About the universal healthcare he offered in the hem of his garment.

And they're trying to fill in the blanks between what they remember and what's circulating at the rumor mill.

Jesus starts to preach. And I can imagine that people who were gathered to listen expected him to sound like them – they expected a familiar accent, a familiar cadence, a familiar message.

But then he started talkin' that other stuff. About new possibilities for the brokenhearted, the undocumented, the ones who sat behind bars.

The people in Nazareth decided before the sermon was over: Jesus did not deserve a welcome home party.

The text says they threw him shade.

He was not celebrated – he was notorious.

Who do you think you are, Jesus?

We knew you when, Jesus!

Aren't you Joseph's boy?

You come from carpenter stock.

Ain't you Mary's baby?

You come from teen pregnancy stock.

You might be the revolutionary, the preaching sensation in those other cities, Jesus. But we know you were a problem child from the beginning, thinking you could teach us something before you even left your mama's house, Jesus.

Do you think you're better than this zip code, Jesus?

Do you think you're worth more than this tax bracket, Jesus?

How did you get this special anointing to do what you're doing, Jesus?

There's no place like home.

At home, there is a thin line between appreciation and resentment.

At home, there is a thin line between making change and making trouble.

At home, there is a thin line between inspiration and insult.

The writer of John's gospel says it this way: He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

I can hear the sadness in Jesus response:

"Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."

This morning you might be the one experiencing this – you might feel like kinfolk are strangers and strangers are kin.

You might feel famous at work but infamous once you turn the key in the lock at your house.

You might feel indicted because of how your life got started, not where you are today.

You might feel maligned because your giftedness makes others feel inadequate and astounded.

You might feel that you are rarely the beneficiary of the healing, liberative work you do for others.

The petty person inside of me – the one who finds "going home" a complicated and often frustrating activity – wants to end the sermon right here. The petty preacher might say to you that "hometown haters" will always be waiting with folded arms and plenty of shade. I want to say that "hometown" folk will follow you on Facebook and pick up resentments with every "Like". I want to say that you can count on the "hometown" folk to walk back down memory lane at every opportunity – pulling out receipts of your misdeeds and exploits – because they saved every single one.

The petty preacher wants to say to you: maybe home ain't where your heart needs to be.

But thank God today – that the gospel ain't petty.

Just in case we were about ready to close the book after Jesus' solemn truth-telling and go on to the next city, verse 5 knocks me back into my seat:

“And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.”

Wait.

The writer of Mark seems to suggest here that something happened to Jesus' ability to be powerful when he was home in Nazareth?

Something about being rejected not only made him mournful; it also compromised his ability to do his work.

How many of us stop trying after an encounter with the hometown crowd?

How many of us are still running away from home?

How many of us have felt a power shut down after being rejected?

As we think about how we can be resilient in a world that is constantly telling us we are not who we claim to be...that we are not worth an embrace...that we are not good enough to know what we know and to do what we do...

How can we know whether to stay put – to continue to try – or to go – to move on to the next town, the next crowd?

Verse 5 says that there were a few sick people in Nazareth – just a few – who received the healing touch of Jesus and were cured.

Jesus did not abandon his work in Nazareth. There were some there who believed in new possibilities. He ministered to them. He touched them.

I'm reminded of a portion of Jewish rabbinic commentary on Micah 6:8 – Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

Jesus does the work he is sent to do AT HOME – in the very place that rejected him. But then, I believe that Jesus sets up boundaries that protect his heart and protect the work of the gospel movement.

The text says that:

6:7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

6:8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts;

6:9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

6:10 He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place.

6:11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."

These words speak to me as I think about how we can be sustained in a political season where civility is invoked to shut up the prophets.

Jesus prepares his disciples for the inevitable rejections they will face as they spread words of possibility and hope and justice at home and elsewhere.

Yet he does not let himself or them off the hook for doing what they are called to do.

He says to them:

1. Remember that you have authority. Don't let anybody tell you that you have no power. HOW TO BE.
2. Pack light. Do not be tethered to hearing accolades by those you encounter. Do not exploit or plunder those you encounter. Do not hide behind accessories and excess. HOW TO PREPARE.
3. Stay as long as the door to transformation is open. Trust and be trustworthy. WHEN TO STAY.
4. Leave if you are refused a seat at the table. WHEN TO GO.
5. Shake off the residue as you go. You are not responsible for another person's ability to hear, understand, transform.
You don't internalize another person's rejection.
You don't have to linger too long in the doorway of inhospitality.
You don't have to live covered in dust. HOW TO LEAVE.

Shake it off.

Don't let the dust of rejection stain your clothes.

Shake it off.

Don't inhale the residue of your disappointments.

Shake it off.

Don't stay.