

First Presbyterian Church
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There's No Place Like Home
Mark 6: 1-6a

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. 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! 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. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Today is about a homecoming.

For this brother of mine learned to walk on Queens Road,
and to run on the trails at McAlpine Greenway Park.

Pen is a Randolph Raider, an East Meck Eagle.

He had his first kiss at a movie theatre on Independence Blvd
and his first speeding ticket on Sardis Road.

He was baptized with water that came from the Charlotte Mecklenburg Utility Department,
and confirmed in a church that had just been freshly dug from the red clay dirt of Matthews.

And here he is: back in the Queen City—a homecoming.

You've invited me to preach his installation.
I can't tell you how honored I am to be with you,
how humbled I am to stand in your pulpit,
how touched I am to get to celebrate this day with my brother,
 who has always been my dearest friend.

But I must confess, I also can't tell you how eager I am to
hear what you hometown folks have to say. Things like:

Is not this the preacher's kid who snuck out of Sunday School?
Is not this the boy who used to have long hair down to his shoulders?

As for me, I don't really consider Charlotte my hometown.
My parents moved me to Asheville when I was a teenager.

It was in the mountains where I learned to drive.
And it is there where I know exactly how the air smells,
and how the fog hangs low in the valley in the morning.
It's in Asheville, where I can tell you that the towels don't really ever dry out because it's so humid in
the summer.

I graduated from Asheville High School in the town's Thomas Wolfe Auditorium.
Thomas Wolfe, the Asheville-Native-Author who said:
You Can't Go Home Again.
Homecoming isn't as easy as it may seem.

You Can't Go Home Again. Sounds a lot like Jesus, when he says:
A Prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown.

I don't know if Jesus was expecting a joyous homecoming.
He'd been away, traveling all over the place.
He'd raised a little girl,
 just told her to get up when everyone thought she was dead.
And he healed a woman who had been hemorrhaging for a decade. *A decade.*
He'd freed a man from mental illness,
stilled a storm,
called some brothers to fish for people.

And then Jesus comes home--home to Nazareth,
where he knows what the air smells like there on a Saturday evening,
 as Sabbath begins.
where he knows the roads by heart as he makes his way to the Synagogue.
where he can guess, like you can, where people are gonna sit when they get there.

And then Jesus teaches.
And the people, his people:
those that had changed his diapers and those that taught him middle school,
they started to say: "Is not this the carpenter?"

In other words:
"this guy built our doorframes and sanded our kitchen tables, who does he think he is, preaching like
that?"

They say: "Is not this the son of Mary?"
And they didn't mean that as a compliment to his momma.
It's noticeable that they don't say son of Joseph.
That might have lent him more credibility, maybe.

They say "Is not this the brother of James,
and weren't his sisters in the marching band down at Hebrew High?"

And maybe this is Mark's point.

Maybe the Gospel is trying to point out that this Jesus guy really is human.
That the one who calms the sea and heals the sick is one who entered into *this* world.
That *like us* he had a job, that *like us* he had a mom,
that *like us* he had siblings that he might be embarrassed by.

This is true. The Word *did* become flesh—
the great God of heaven and earth “gets” us, and gets close in order to save us.

But I think there is more going on here:
When Mark says that the hometown crew “took offense” at him,
the greek word is skandelidzmo, from which we get the word “scandalized” but it literally means
“tripped up” or “caused to stumble.” Mark tells us what Jesus said “tripped them up.”

They didn’t know what to do with him. They were tripping all over themselves.

Can I be a nerd with you for a minute?

In Kansas I am a Pastor of Pastoral Care and part of my love for my job comes from an interest in
understanding how families function and how human beings interact. There is a theory in pastoral
counseling that is called Family Systems Theory.

It understands the family as a dynamic system of interconnected parts. And there’s a balance. Now,
granted what one family might call balance another might call chaos. But still for every system there
is a balance.

And so if one member of the family changes,
the whole system is impacted. Even if they aren’t living under the same roof anymore,
the family all still lives under the same “emotional skin” – so if one piece shifts, all do.
I know you’ve seen this.

Dad stops drinking and though it’s what the family has been praying for,
they don’t know how to handle the sobriety. They were used to the way things were.

Mom decides that instead of allowing herself to be used as a doormat—buckling to everyone’s else’s
whims and needs, she will be assertive and protect her boundaries. And the rest of the family is
skandelidzmo, all tripped up.

The family has to adjust/re-structure. They have to search for their new balance.

Jesus comes home. And he starts preaching.
He comes home and he’s not the same as he was before he left.
He probably was *always* this way, but now they can see it—because he took it public.

To his hometown family Jesus has changed:
now he touches unclean people, he tells strange stories about seeds,

he raises the dead and cures the sick,
he tells perfect strangers to turn their lives around
because the kingdom of God has come near.

He had changed and they were all tripped up.
For ultimately, Jesus changed what it felt like for *them* to be at home.
He was saying that home—true home—was still ahead of them.
And they took offense. *They* didn't want to change.

Seems to me that this is the reaction that Jesus would get in all our hometowns.

He's constantly lifting a voice of change. . .
telling us that as much as we love the smell,
and as much as we know our way around by heart,
we are not really home yet.

Because Jesus is always reminding us that contrary to how we think about it, home.. where we really belong, is not something behind us, something return to.. *home is always ahead of us*. Something we are always living toward.

So we are to be readjusting, restructuring, re-setting the balance
such that our hometowns grow more and more into the likeness of the kingdom of God:

where all are healed
and all are fed
and all are valued
and all are whole.

Where, as Isaiah dreamed it, the sound of weeping will not be heard,
where the wolf and lamb will eat together,
where there will be no hurt
. . . . for that is really what home is.

This morning you all are installing Pen to be your pastor.
He will stand next to this baptismal font
and answer questions that are bigger than him.

Will he serve you with energy, intelligence, imagination and love?
Will he proclaim good news, teach faith, care for you?
Will he show the love and justice of Jesus Christ
and work for the reconciliation of the world?

He will say yes.

And I know him. Minus his first two years, I've known him all his life,
and I know he will do everything he can to live his "yes" here with you.

But the truth is the only way he can say yes,
is because of those waters he's standing by.

The only way he can say yes is because of the grace that we touch in that water.

It's why it's here every week.

Baptism is a homecoming, you know.
It's a homecoming into God's grace.
It's a homecoming into God's family system.
And it is beautiful.

But it's also got a bit of scandalidzmo in it, too. It trips us up and asks us to change.
Baptism is also about mission.

When this church baptized little baby Jackson James Guy this past month,
you were saying that he belongs here. He was home here in God's family.

And you also promised him that as he grew you'd invite him to join you:
join you at the *Loaves and Fishes* pantry
 where you provide food for people whose stomach's growl
join you as you build friendship in the Yucatan and in the Congo,
 proclaiming that they are your brothers and sisters too.
join you as you pull out cots for *Room at the Inn*
 where you make sure that in the cold, people have a place to lay their head.

You invited he to join you in *your work*.
Because you know that *home* is out ahead of you.

And so drenched in that water,
you, and little Jackson James
and this lanky brother of mine—hair all cut short now—
all together can set out to work for the *home* that's ahead.

A pastor friend of mine named Bill told the story about
a father who called him seeking counseling.
Bill pastored a church just a ½ block from a University campus.
This father called Bill because things weren't going well at home.
His daughter, Molly, was the problem.

Bill had helped with this family before.
When Molly was and fledging undergrad,
unsure of her way,
he had welcomed her to into the congregation's per her father's urging.
Her father was determined Molly needed a home base to make it through school.

She found her stride and graduated with honors.
Currently she was enrolled in the Med School.

Her dad was thrilled. He was a cardiologist, as was his father.
It was a family affair.

But he was calling Bill because something was going awry.
Molly had done a medical internship in a clinic in a developing country.
And upon her return, she decided that instead of medicine,
which she still thought of as a valued profession,
but instead of medicine,
she really wanted to study economics as it particularly related to developing nations.
And so she dropped out of medical school.
And her dad was in Bill's office in a nanosecond.

What did I do? he pled.
What happened?

Bill responded:

*"What you did is that 7 years ago Molly you stood beside Molly as she was baptized.
What happened is that she's still finding her way home."*

I don't exactly what the dad heard.

Did he hear "she still finding her way home" in the way that
eventually Molly would come around
eventually she would get back on track—*his* track
eventually the balance would return to what it was in their system?

Or could he hear that Molly, like all of us who have been touched by these waters,
could he hear that Molly was finding her way toward the home
that God hopes for all people.

That is my prayer:
that we are all still finding our way home.

That is my prayer.

And my joy is that you Pen, get to find that way home with these people,
and they, with you.

Thanks be to God.
Amen