

Jon Hauerwas – “Home” – July 8, 2018
Psalm 48:1-3, 9-14 and Mark 6:1-13

For those of us who believe that Jesus was extraordinary and that he was, in fact, the Son of God, it can be difficult to understand the negative reactions of some of his contemporaries. Why, for example, did some people reject him or take offense at him? And, specifically, why did some people seem less inclined to believe in him or follow him when they shared the same hometown?

William Hazlitt once wrote, “though familiarity may not breed contempt, it certainly takes the edge off of admiration.” Is that what we’re talking about here? Well, to some extent, yes. But, perhaps, not in the same way that we may, at first, imagine.

Our second lesson this morning says that some of Jesus’ contemporaries chose to reject him or, more specifically, that they took offense at him. It’s easy for us to understand how our spouses, parents, children, and friends may appreciate so much about us and yet, at the same time, be offended by our mistakes and shortcomings. But, if Jesus was without sin, as the Christian Church has long professed, then we’re not talking about sin here.

In other words, it's not as if his peers could rattle off some secret and damning list of Jesus' faults and failings. Because they didn't exist. There was no bribery material here. No Facebook catalog of Jesus acting like a fool. Instead, other people had trouble believing that someone that they had grown up with, someone who seemed so entirely human on the surface, could also be one with God.

Jesus is said to have been a carpenter. The Greek word is *tecton* and could just as easily mean stone cutter. What would you think about Jesus if you recently built a house with him? You might have a mental record of those interactions. They all seemed so ordinary. He had a sense of humor. He got tired from the hard work. He had to eat and go to the bathroom just like you did. Unfortunately, the house didn't miraculously build itself, which is the least that he could have offered. On the surface, Jesus seemed much like everyone else.

Jesus wasn't willing to offer a sign when others requested it. You may recall when Satan told him to jump off of the temple for he would surely be saved by a throng of angels who would not let him dash his head against a stone. Or on the cross, when they scoffed at him and mocked him, they said, "let him save himself if he is the Son of God." Jesus was not willing to bow and cede to such demands.

Instead, he was willing to reveal his essence at the times and in the places and ways of his choosing.

But there's more going on here, as well. You may recall the parable of the Prodigal Son. In that lesson, not only was it offensive for the wayward son to ask for his inheritance up front and then squander it all through a series of frivolous choices. But, it was also offensive for him to leave his family behind in such a dramatic fashion.

Today, we move and travel with relative ease from one city to the next. State, regional, and even national boundaries do not prevent us from pursuing employment in distant lands. And when we do take a position far from home, we can easily stay in touch with loved ones thanks to the realities of the telephone, text messaging, e-mail, and video conferencing, in addition to a myriad of high speed transportation options. All of these developments make the world feel and seem just a little bit smaller.

But, in the ancient world, caring for the extended family was paramount. So when the Prodigal Son physically left his family of origin behind, it was a form of abandonment. Far from home, how was he to know if a loved one was gravely

ill? And where could he be found if a parent or another relative suddenly died? In his absence, the prodigal was essentially withdrawing any care and support that he may have offered to his parents or his sibling in their times of need.

In a similar fashion, the missionary life that Jesus was pursuing would take him away from his family of origin, to places foreign and far away where he could not be easily reached and where he could not care for his extended family should the need arise. At this, his contemporaries scoffed, saying, ““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?””

In other words, “does this self-styled prophet not understand his family obligations or does he simply not care?” In cutting ties with his father’s profession and with town where his parents still lived, was he insinuating that he was better than them? Was he just too selfish to recognize his family’s needs? The implication here is that Jesus’ actions brought dishonor to his loved ones in a society where shame was to be avoided at all costs. Whatever his motivations, Jesus’ actions reflect poorly on both him and his family.

In response, Jesus does not curse his hometown. He still does good deeds among them. But, then, he keeps moving because God's plan is more expansive. Soon, he sends his disciples forth in pairs to share the good news, instructing them that not everyone will be receptive to the message and claiming that when they encounter stiff resistance, they are not to be discouraged but are to keep moving until they find a more receptive audience.

This, for us, is a message of perseverance in the face of obstacles. There will be times when our gifts and skills will not be received in the way that we would have liked. But we need not be discouraged. Instead, we can seek another way serve God and community. If we just keep moving, there may be another place, another skill, or another way that will affirm the offering of our hands. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.