

5 Pentecost: July 9, 2006
St. Francis Episcopal Church
Holden, MA
The Rev. Darrell Huddleston

Ezek. 2:1-5
Ps. 48
2 Cor. 12:2-10
Mk. 6:1-13

Our gospel lesson has provided two popular sayings in our culture: “You can never go home again,” made famous by Thomas Wolfe’s book, and “A prophet is without honor in his own country.” They are expressions well founded by experience.

“You can never go home again.” Most people have one particular place that is home to them, usually the place of our childhood years. It seems to hold true even for those who have moved around while growing up. Our children spent their early years in Africa, New Hampshire, Kansas and California, yet it is New Hampshire that is home for them and that’s where they now live, although not in the town where they spent most of their childhood years. Bunny’s family moved three or four times while she was young, yet it is Winfield, Kansas that is her hometown. For me, it the family farm and the little community of South Haven, Kansas, total population around 400. Each of you could name your hometown.

Nostalgia and overly romanticized memories come to shape those home places in our minds. Even if you still live in your hometown, that can still hold true. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, persons who had such a horrendous experience either through family or community that they spend the rest of their lives trying to escape from that reality, or at least having to live elsewhere in order to cope with it. But, for most of us, nostalgia is the order of the day.

Then when we return home either to visit or to live it is never the same place we left years before. Things change. Even the physical character of places change. When I was growing up my little hometown had several thriving businesses, including two grocery stores, three cafes, three gas stations, two grain elevators, a drug store, hardware store, school and three churches, plus other shops. Now, all the buildings on Main street are boarded up, or have been torn down and the only businesses left are a grain elevator on one end of town, a tiny post office, an even smaller building housing a branch bank, a senior center and the fire/police department. And, oh yes, a do-it-yourself carwash, which consists of a concrete slab and a garden house with a brush on the end of it. The school and the three churches still remain, unlike many small farming communities in Kansas where no longer exist either school or church.

Another thing that has changed is that I no longer know 80-90% of the people. Those persons I grew up with and loved and who loved me now reside in the cemetery one mile south of town or moved away. It’s not the same hometown.

In addition, we change because our ideas and values change. The way you think is not necessarily the way many of those in your hometown think or view the world. I’ll never forget a childhood friend of mine commenting to me upon my return home from seminary at Boston University, “Darrell, you talk like an Easterner...you’ve taken on Eastern airs.” It was not particularly meant as a compliment. You can’t go home again...not to the home you knew as a child.

Jesus is going back home, back to Nazareth. Back to where everybody knew him as the son of Joseph and Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Jude and Simon, plus several unnamed sisters. The little kid that was in Hebrew school with them...the young man who learned the trade of a carpenter at his father's side and who lived and worked there as a carpenter until he was around 30 years of age. He had not been gone that long, but when he came back he was different enough to the point that they commented on it.

Jesus was a man who worked with his hands, which is the literal meaning of the Greek word (τεκτων)) for carpenter. He was a man they knew who did hard physical labor building benches, boxes, coffins, door frames, oxen yokes, plows and beds, which is what a carpenter did in those days. It was an occupation that was not the lowliest, nor was it the loftiest. Jesus would not have been considered on the level of a day laborer nor would he have been considered one of the educated class in his village. He did respectable work, had his place in the village social order, a good future, no doubt...then he ups and leaves. He leaves his family...his mother and siblings. Joseph was most likely dead since he is not mentioned.

Upon his return, his fellow villagers were “astounded” at his remarks and “took offense at him.” Astounded does not mean they were “wowed” by his teachings and healings, rather they were affronted by his audacity. From their perspective, he was being “uppity” and had forgotten “his place.” Their challenge to him can be summed up as “Just who do you think you are anyway?” “Just because crowds follow you around in other places believing you can heal them, don’t think that makes you better than us!” Their attitude prompted his now famous remark, “*Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, among their own kin, and in their own house.*”

To help us understand the import of all that, listen to what Pheme Perkins, professor of New Testament at Boston College writes:

Reading the episode against the backdrop of honor and shame in peasant villages provides some insight into the hostile reception. Jesus had stepped out of the status and role in society that he had in the village of 1,600 to 2,000 people... Villagers commonly resent those who attempt to elevate their position above that to which they are entitled by birth. The attempt by Jesus’ family to stop his wandering and public preaching in 3:21 implies that from the perspective of the village, Jesus was thought to be dishonoring his family...The oldest son was expected to take his father’s place in the extended family. Jesus’ behavior must have been a painful puzzle to his family. (NIB, “Mark,” vol. 8, pp. 592-593)

It’s not easy being a prophet, let alone the Messiah. We heard in the lesson from Ezekiel God’s instructions to him, “*Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them...do not be afraid of them...afraid of their words...dismayed by their looks.*” It wouldn’t surprise me if Jesus, “*amazed at their unbelief*” didn’t keep repeating those words to himself in order to not become discouraged.

We read about this incident in Nazareth and marvel that they were blind to who was in the midst of them. But how often it is that we don’t see the presence of God in our midst, in our ordinary

lives, occupations and preoccupations. We become so accustomed to the places we live, to the people we know, that we no longer recognize Christ present in them.

Even though it is true that we can never go home again, it is also true that we do not need to become discouraged. We do not need to feel powerless and helpless when others try to mold us to their expectations. Just as Jesus was not deterred by his experience, so neither do we need be deterred. His reaction was to continue his ministry...to continue going about the villages teaching. His reaction was to call the twelve and send them out in ministry.

With Christ as our Foundation, as the hymn proclaims, it is true---

- That the eyes of faith can enable us to make a home wherever we reside, where with Christ the smallest of things takes on significance.
- That the hand of God is at work in our homes, whether that is in our own house or in our church or in our community.
- That we can see Christ present in the little loving and kind acts people do for one another.
- That we can see it in the courageous stands that neighbors take against injustice done to another person, neighbors who are being prophets in their hometowns.
- That we can create a new hometown whenever we treat one another as persons in their own right, not as they might have been or as we wish to remember them.
- That most of all we are at home wherever we are when Christ resides in our hearts and when we are always looking for Christ in our neighbor.