

“Jesus returns home”

Readings: Luke 4:14-30

Let us begin with a poem:

Hometown Memories, identity and belonging, the place I grew up,
where I was born and bred, shaping who I am.

They knew who I am.

They knew my parents.

They saw me as Mummy’s child, expected me to be like her.

I wondered who I am to them?

And who I am in their hands? I am a girl... that much, I think.

I get patronised because I am not like them,

I am different, they said,

they kept an eye on me and expected me to do

what they expected me to do.

But when the right time came

turned out

I don’t know who I am.

I once thought there wasn’t any life outside my hometown,

but what did I know?

I have decided to come out and be the REAL ME.

They couldn’t accept me,

who I really am.

In their eyes I was still Mummy’s child,

still they wondered why I walked away. I

have left the place behind

Let us pray: Holy Spirit, empower us to listen, pause and reflect on your words and message. May your words be a challenge to our faith and life, and we pray we embody this truth through our actions. Give us love for you and love for one another. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. Amen.

Just imagine it: Jesus returns home to his local synagogue where he was brought up, where people have known him as a child, where ‘aunts’ and ‘uncles’ have congratulated him on small achievements, and celebrated his bar mitzvah. It is among these people Jesus returns and finds himself in this new role as Son of God. However, he is still that little child they all knew. “Doesn’t he look like his mum! I remember him when he was so high with snot running down his face.”

Now he is sitting where the rabbis sit, the ones with wisdom and authority granted to them by the congregations they lead.

He takes the scroll, reads from Isaiah, and proclaims these words have come true in the hearing of these aunts and uncles. Two things to comment on. He gives no sermon of any length, just a sentence: These words have come true in your **HEARING**. Preaching and hearing are two halves of the one equation. You can preach and run around with sandwich boards, use the coolest PowerPoint, preach by clever memes, but nothing happens to the word, no matter how eloquent it is, unless it is heard. It is in the hearing, it becomes reality. Only when it is heard, internalised, made our own, when it becomes part of our DNA, the word becomes more than print.

Secondly, the congregation, made up of his parent's friends and neighbours are amazed at what he's said. Now, we can understand the word 'amazed' in the sense of awed by what he has said: an enthusiasm and wonder that 'one of our own' has brought wisdom and insight into these ancient words.

Or we can understand being 'amazed' as 'how this boy has changed, how arrogant he has become. Does he realise he has just insulted us? How does he have the audacity to say these things to us, who have nursed him and cared for him?' Because Jesus is implying that these words of Isaiah, old as they are, have still not been realised because they have not been 'heard' by his parent's neighbours and friends. They have been preached, but the words have not come alive. Then, it is their turn. While many translations say the congregation spoke highly of him, the original root of the word is less positive. It is closer to surprised or astonished. Which changes the sense of their comment:

'Is this not Joseph's son'. Now we can hear that as a cutting down to size comment: 'Ha! Does he not remember he is only the carpenter's son. Who does he think he is?' Commentators such as Malina and Rohrbaugh make the point that in western society we do not quite get the magnitude of the insult implied in the question. And to their now hostile question, Jesus makes a hostile repost. 'Doctor, heal yourself'. This is no different from the hostile attack the devil makes on Jesus about 'save yourself' and then later at the crucifixion too. All these stories are linked.

The hostility grows and we may not appreciate how damaging it was in a society where honour was everything. It wasn't power or wealth that you were judged by but the honour you were given, and Jesus is being dishonourable towards those who brought him up. With their honour insulted, the crowd needed to respond and they act by attempting to throw Jesus off the cliff. The whole encounter is a mess and it all stems from recognising the Good News can be preached but it also needs to be heard. In doing so we honour the gospel.

Jesus returns home. Two things as part of reflection and challenge, did they not listen and reject Jesus because of the messenger? Or they rejected Jesus because of the Message?

The message of Jesus in our scripture reading is a challenge: First one is we are called to bring the good news to poor. Second, God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives. Third is recovery of sight to the blind. Fourth is to set free those who are oppressed. And last is to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. The five messages or challenges aim to empower the marginalized, oppressed, and outcasts. There is no positive message for the wealthy, those who oppress others, individuals who are racist, and those are opposed to peace and freedom. At first the town's people were pleased with these words of Jesus, they were amazed. They thought that Jesus is referring to freeing the Jews under the Roman Empire. Until a few moments later when Jesus taught that true faith was also found outside of Israel and among the Gentiles. Jesus is breaking the barriers.

In verse 21 Jesus said, "What you have just heard me read has come true today". What does this mean? This statement is indicating the kind of life and ministry that Jesus will live and share. He is telling the people that I will be fulfilling these words thru my actions, words of freedom, recovery, release, proclamations and bringing of good news. Bring: He will deliver the good news to all, he will teach and preach. Release: He is not referring to those who are in prison, he is referring to those who are in bondage with sin and corruption, remove their chains. Recovery: giving light to those who are in darkness, not just giving sight to the blind, but giving directions and hope to the people who are lost. Freedom: again this does not pertain to Jews being controlled by the Roman empire, it pertains to people who are at the bottom of the society. People who have no freedom, like widows, women, Samaritans, outcast, sick people, to free them, he will empower them. Jesus is going to show them equality in the eyes of our Lord. And last is Proclamation: it is defined as a formal public statement or declaration. With this Jesus is saying the good news of salvation, grace and love is for all, Jews, gentiles, Greeks or Romans. To announce it in public is to indicate that this message is given for all, not specific groups or individuals. His Ministry will be in the streets and not in the synagogues. This is what he will fulfill, and with this message people in Nazareth were amazed, but their amazement was transformed into anger.

By learning the story, I want to ask this question, what is the message for us? Is it important for you who delivers the message? Do you want the message that is pleasing to the ears? How do you react if the message is pertaining to you or your lifestyle? We measure the truth and love in the message, not the messenger. Sometimes the messenger's background is amazing but if they deliver a message that is manipulating, these are false prophets.

Let us realize that we listen to the good news not because the news should be pleasing to our ears, but because it is news that brings goodness and blessings to our lives. News is called good if it's news that promotes love, compassion, kindness, freedom, peace and equality. Through this story, we realize that not everyone welcomes the word of Jesus; if the message is not aligned with their lifestyle, people reject it. Jesus introduces the ministry for the poor and for the Gentiles, which the Jewish authorities rejected. Rejection does not diminish Jesus but rather diminishes those who reject the message. Some people will react with anger, questions and doubt.

Faith is about our reaction to the reflection; do you believe the message? It's a simple question of yes or no. If you say "yes, " then fulfill it and show it in your life. We need to become the voice of Jesus in our time right now. You can start with yourself, your family, in the community, and the Church.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. And has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." If the Spirit is in you then fulfill this. Amen