

See what happened to a home-town Savior...

Many of you know that I was in Minnesota last weekend, celebrating my dad’s retirement from ministry. So on Sunday I got to worship in the church I grew up in, alongside all the people I grew up with. It was a joy to be there.

But before I left, one of the Hispanic members pulled me aside and expressed some concern that I might not come back. I was puzzled. Why wouldn’t I come back? Well, he explained, since my dad was retiring, his church would probably ask me to take his place. He was afraid I’d say yes and stay.

I had to tell him: That’s not gonna happen. It would be extremely unwise for them to call me, or for me to accept the call – to pastor the people I’ve known from little on. You know why? Because they’ve known me from little on. In their minds, I’m just “pastor’s kid” – it’d be hard to suddenly respect me as pastor. As I preached from the pulpit, they’d remember cute little Abe in diapers as a toddler. As I taught the 3rd and 4th commandments, they’d think about how I’d sometimes fall asleep in church and get in trouble in Sunday School class as a kid. In short, their familiarity with me could easily become a stumbling block. It could keep them from taking seriously the Word of God I proclaim.

It’s no wonder Jesus said it as a general truth: **“Only in his hometown...is a prophet without honor.”** This morning, Jesus returns to the church he grew up in, the people he grew up with. Not as their full-time pastor, but a guest preacher. And the reason I’d never take a call back to my home church is the reason they rejected him: Their familiarity with Jesus became a stumbling block to them.

Could the same thing happen to us? There’s a warning in these verses lest our familiarity with Jesus or his messengers lead to our rejection, as well. But there’s also a unique glimpse at Jesus’ love, even for those who reject him. Hear what happens to a hometown Savior, as recorded by Mark.

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! ³ Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

⁴ Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Jesus’ miracles and his message had already made quite a splash all around Galilee. So it’s no surprise that when he comes home and worships in the synagogue he grew up in, they ask him to preach. Mark doesn’t tell us what he preached, but Luke does. The sermon text was from the book of Isaiah. It describes our miserable condition as captives to sin, and God’s wonderful

promise of a Savior who sets us free. And Jesus' sermon? "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." In other words: "You're the sinners, and I'm the Savior God promised you."

Did you notice how Mark says they reacted? They were taken aback. **Many who heard him were amazed.** At first this sounds like a good thing! But this wasn't a believing amazement; it was an unbelieving amazement. You can hear it in the question Mark says they were asking: **Where does this man get these things?** We might say, "Who does this guy think he is? Where'd he get this wisdom he's sharing? How can those hands work miracles? They made my kitchen table! Yeah, **isn't this** just the **carpenter?** One of Mary's boys – known him since he's this tall. Know his brothers and sisters, too – nothing special about the bunch. Where does he get off calling himself our Savior?"

And they took offense at him, Mark says. Literally, they stumbled and fell because of him. What did they stumble over? You could say: Their familiarity with him. What a blessing to have known Jesus for so long! To see with their eyes what our bibles don't record – how Jesus grew in wisdom and stature from a boy to a man. But because of the sin in their hearts, that blessing became a stumbling block. An excuse to turn a deaf ear to his good news and reject him. They already knew who he was, and he wasn't the Savior.

I wonder if the same thing doesn't happen to us. I admit, there are some big differences between you and the people in Nazareth that day. They didn't believe Jesus could be their Savior; you do. They knew Jesus when he was this tall; you didn't. But many of you have known Jesus since *you* were this tall. Most of you have known Jesus for years. And what a blessing that is – to know God's love and forgiveness so well!

But it's a blessing that the sinful nature in us turns into a stumbling block. Familiarity can lead to apathy, become an excuse to turn a deaf ear to Jesus' message. There's no better news than what Jesus has done for you and what it means for you, but isn't it true that we sometimes treat this best of news as if it were old news? "I already know this." And you take it in with a yawn. And then maybe you stop taking it in altogether – a switch flips in your mind, and you start thinking about other things.

Sometimes it's not familiarity with the message, but with the messenger, that leads to the same rejection. The more you get to know your pastor, the more you realize he's a sinner like you. Same goes with your brothers and sisters in the faith. But then the time comes when one of them has to call you on the carpet for something you did, or didn't do...and our pride turns that familiarity into a stumbling block. Say with the people of Nazareth, "You're no better than me. Who do you think you are? Where do you get off telling me I'm wrong?"

⁴ **Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." And he was amazed at their lack of faith.** Now it's Jesus' turn to be amazed – but again, not in a good way. This a sad, painful amazement. That it's not just the people who don't know him who are capable of rejecting him. It's the people who know him best. The people who have gone to church with him for years. Us.

And yet...Jesus still went. He still went to his hometown to preach to the people there. He was willing to suffer this hurt of being rejected by his neighbors and relatives, because their salvation mattered that much to him. And that's just a little glimpse of the same saving love that Jesus has shown to you and to me.

God knew that sinful mankind's default mode is rejecting him. He knew before he came into this world that he'd come to his own, and his own would not receive him. He knew all the

ways you and I would turn a deaf ear to him. And yet he still loved us. And he still came into this world as one of us. He came because our salvation mattered that much to him. In fact, it mattered so much to him that he was willing to suffer a rejection far more painful than the one he experienced in Nazareth to accomplish it. He took all of your sins and my sins and the people of Nazareth's sins to the cross. He suffered God's rejection there – the eternal rejection that you and I deserved – to win your forgiveness.

The last verse of our text is really the saddest verse of the whole lesson. Mark simply says, **“Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.”** His hometown had rejected him; so Jesus went elsewhere with the good news, to people who would receive it.

It's the saddest verse of the whole lesson, but it also highlights God's grace to you and to me. Think about it: Jesus hasn't taken his word elsewhere. We deserve nothing less, but in love we don't deserve, he's letting you hear his Word again this morning. Your salvation matters that much to him. He's calling you on the carpet for your sins. He's assuring you he came and paid for every last one.

It's the same message he preached in Nazareth, the same one you've heard all these years – and thank God it hasn't changed! Because it's the only message that saves. It's the only message able to break down our natural rejection and keep a living trust in Jesus in our hearts. Don't let your familiarity with it or the lowly people who bring it lead you to stop listening. Listen every time as if it were the first time. Listen every time as if it were Jesus himself speaking to you – because in his Word he truly is. Listen, and you'll find that the more you come to know it, the more you come to love it. God grant that for all of us. Amen.