

2 Samuel 5:1-5,9,10  
Psalm 48  
2 Corinthians 12:2-10  
Mark 6:1-13

Proper 9B  
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island  
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### The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

Listen.

That's the Sea of Galilee in the Holy Land. The sea of Galilee isn't really a sea, it's a lake a little bit bigger than Bainbridge Island. The Jordan River flows through, from north to south, and the Sea is still dotted with fishing boats full of men throwing their nets over one side, and then the other. Many of the towns along the water's edge are places you know about – Korazin the town that would not repent, Bethsaida where Jesus healed the blind man, the little fishing village of Tiberias, Magdala, Mary Magdalene's home, Gannesaret the beautiful garden village where everyone brought their sick people to be healed, and Capernaum, Jesus' adopted hometown.

Years ago on a January evening, I sat on the sea wall in Capernaum watching the sun go down over Mt Tabor, near Nazareth in the southwest. And as I sat in the stillness, I felt tears running down my cheeks. Perhaps it was because the lapping water was the only sound I could hear, or because the air smelled of grilled fish, or because the sunset was so stunningly beautiful. Or perhaps it was because Jesus had been in just this place. I think my tears were for him. Looking over that lake all the way to Nazareth, Jesus' beloved home, the place he longed to go back to but wasn't welcome broke my heart. How very sad it must be, I thought, not to be able to go home.

It certainly wasn't for lack of trying that Jesus couldn't go back. He had been traveling throughout Galilee, calling disciples and gathering a huge following of all kinds – everyone from curiosity seekers to devoted followers. He mesmerized them with parables of sowers who went out to sow and mustard seeds that grew into the greatest of all shrubs. He astonished them when he cured a man with a withered hand, healed the Gerasene demoniac, healed a woman who had been bleeding for over a decade, and restored a little girl to life. Jesus was well known by this time, and his reputation preceded him wherever he went – at least wherever he went outside his hometown.

But even after all those healings, all those miracles, all those stunning teachings, when Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth to speak to his own people, the ones who had watched him grow up as a boy, things didn't go well. Oh, it started alright... *"Many who heard him were astounded. '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!'"* It sounds as though the hometown crowd was pretty impressed. We're told the people were *"astounded."* But their astonishment wasn't what you might think. The original Greek word Mark uses, the word he translates as *"astounded"* has little to do with being amazed or awed. This word - *ekplesso*, actually means something much closer to drive out, drive away; to strike with panic and shock. In other words, the people were in a full tilt panic. That hometown crowd wasn't thinking about how awesome

the hometown boy was, they were probably thinking *“Oh no you don’t! You don’t get to go away, get famous, then come back here and tell us WE need to start changing OUR lives.”* No wonder they changed their tune... *“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...

When Jesus returned to his hometown with a stunning reputation for brilliant preaching and miraculous miracles, were the streets lined with fans? No. Was there a big parade or a grand welcome? No. There wasn’t even a special coffee hour with a cake that said, *“We’re so proud of you, Jesus!”* The people who had known him the longest, the moms who had patched his scrapped knees, the rabbis who had taught him to read, the boys who had played in the streets with him, the neighbors who had watched him grow into a young man – all those people seemed just to want him to go away.

What didn’t those familiar people in Nazareth see, and why couldn’t they see it? What was it that blinded them to the Light of the world in their midst? Was it just that he was familiar? Was it that they thought they knew the real, regular Jesus? Were they stuck in an old story of their own making and blind to the truth right in front of them? They had a lot of preconceived ideas about Jesus, all based on their own biases, baggage and brokenness. That’s likely true of us too. The hometown crowd thought they knew who the real Jesus was – he was just the big brother of James, Joses, Judas, Simon and those unnamed sisters, so maybe they thought it was ridiculous to be calling Jesus a wisdom teacher or a miracle maker.

I can understand why the hometown crowd might have belittled Jesus. They were probably afraid of what they were seeing and hearing. They might have been jealous, might have been feeling ashamed. And angry. They were probably pretty angry. You know the way Jesus talks. You know what he says and what he asks of us. If we took everything he said to heart, we would all need to change our lives. I can understand why the hometown crowd thought they had to disregard and demean him. He was far too emboldened. He was making dangerous propositions.

*“He’s just a carpenter! We grew up with this guy, and we’re not special, so he’s not special either. What gives him the right to come back here and make all these demands of us? Why does he speak with such authority? Who do you think you are, Jesus?”*

Who do you think you are?

Stunning and stinging words, as you know if those words have ever been directed at you. I wonder if those words stung the very human Jesus? The scripture tells us that he couldn’t get much done in his hometown, because of the people’s unbelief. Maybe they were offended because Jesus had stepped into the authority God had given him. Maybe they were offended because taking offense was more palatable than being ashamed of themselves for not taking God as seriously as Jesus had. Maybe they were ashamed for not having stepped into the authority God had given them, too.

As it turns out, unbelief and having too small a sense of ourselves, go hand in hand. When we cannot see our own goodness, our own light, our own spark of the divine, we're not likely to recognize it in others. Jesus was forever calling forth the light in the people around him, reminding them and us that our lamps belong on the lampstand, not under a bushel basket. Maybe those people just weren't ready to hear about their light.

Contemporary American spiritual writer, Marianne Williamson, said it this way: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."<sup>1</sup>

Are there stories you tell yourself, or stories you tell about yourself, that are no longer true? Are there stories you tell about the people you grew up with or even today's acquaintances that are no longer true? Are there stories you tell about St Barnabas or your job or your family that are no longer true? You see, when we tell stories that are no longer true – whether we're talking to ourselves or to others - when we tell those old, tired stories, we become immobilized, left behind and stuck in a past that will never allow God's future to break in. That's what happened with those people in Jesus' hometown. They kept telling themselves and each other stories that were no longer true, instead of telling the true stories of who and whose they were. Everything would have changed if they had seen the truth of Jesus.

How would life be different if we lived into the true story of the wonderful and sacred mystery that each of us is, here and now? How would life be different if we looked at each other and saw the spectacular beauty of God incarnate? How would life be different if we looked in the mirror, and saw the spectacular beauty of God incarnate? We tend to think we'll find God only in the extraordinary – we forget that God mostly turns up in the ordinariness of our daily lives. That's what happened on that sabbath day in Nazareth. Those folks couldn't see God incarnate right there in front of them because they were looking at somebody they thought they knew, and telling themselves stories that were no longer true. The truth is that God comes to us in the ordinary stuff – the most basic and ordinary stuff of life. Not –for most of us at least- in extraordinary visions or spontaneous miracles... but in the checker at the market, the morning dew drops nestled in the softness of a lady's mantle leaf, in a child's face, a snow-covered mountain, a sparrow's birdsong, in a bit of bread and a sip of wine.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, Marianne. A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles.

God is always and everywhere in the very, very ordinary stuff of life. Perhaps that is something to ponder when you hold out your hands for communion this morning. God comes to us in the most ordinary stuff of life and in the most ordinary people we encounter. We only need to open our minds and our hearts, to let God's story be the story we live and the story we tell, so that we can experience the holy in absolutely everything and everyone around us. Amen