

Fourteenth Sunday – July 5, 2015

If today's gospel is any guide, it's probably a good thing that in my 45 years of priesthood, I was never stationed in my home parish in Derby, Connecticut.

Jesus is back in his hometown after a string of amazing and mighty deeds. He's calmed the seas, driven out demons, healed the sick, and raised the dead. We might expect the local press to run a headline in the "Nazareth Gazette" proclaiming, "Local Boy Makes Good." Alas, such a welcome is not to be. How come?

Well, the hometown folks have known Jesus and his family for much of his life. They knew him as ordinary, unremarkable, humdrum. He likely supported himself and his mother as a carpenter. His life was so unremarkable that there is nothing written in any reliable source about his years from age 12 to 30. Eighteen years. Now 30 years old, Jesus is home again, enters a synagogue and teaches in a way that amazes his audience.

"Where did this man get all this? We know him; we know his family, after all." They found him too much for them and so they marked him down, rejected him, and had no ears for his message.

This scene is not difficult for me to understand. There have been times in my life when I was surprised to learn that someone I know accomplished something totally unexpected. Sometimes my reaction has been congratulations, but too often it has been disbelief or even rejection. Don't we often dismiss insights, advice, and spiritual wisdom quite easily, especially when they come from someone we know, like a family member, a coworker, or a friend? Human beings have a surprising capacity for setting aside messages and messengers who bring wisdom and uncomfortable truth, and so nothing happens, nothing new emerges, no change for the better comes to be. It's no surprise that Jesus was unable to work any mighty deeds in his hometown. Think of trying to light a fire with wood that is thoroughly drenched.

Perhaps the best take away from today's gospel boils down to this: even in the routine and familiar, even in our unremarkable lives, God is powerfully at work. It did no good to think that nothing good could come from Nazareth. What makes us think that nothing good can come from Pelham, New Hampshire either?

Jesus was God-in-the-flesh. He laughed, cried, worked, slept, ate, and suffered to show us the value God invests in earthly and ordinary goings-on. God is not an expert from heaven with a briefcase. God is our neighbor, our friend, our home-grown wisdom. If he acts like our lives are worth living, then maybe we ought to live them more with him. Perhaps religion would be more credible if it bubbled up from the least to the greatest and not the other way around.