

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday After Pentecost: Mark 6:1-13

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We all have different ideas of what home is, probably overlapping, but it's different for everyone. Maybe home is where the heart is, where you hang your hat, or if you're Dolly Parton, where you hang your hair. Maybe home is a place to welcome as many guests as you can fit at the biggest table money can buy, or maybe home is where you go to get away from all those people. I hope home is comfort, but for some it's far from that. I hope home is where you are now. But "home" shifts. When Becca and I first moved here, we called that white building next door "the house" before it faded imperceptibly into "home." Not sure when that happened or how long it took, but at some point, that house fit. I have lived in a lot of places, and many of them are still home. Home is just as often a particular stretch of road or a view I've seen a million times in the background of a million memories or a feeling that only comes with a particular group of people.

The problem is, home doesn't stay put. There's that old saying "you can never go home again." It doesn't mean you can't physically go there, it's that when you do go there, whatever you remember, the actual place can't bear the weight of your nostalgia, and more often than not, neither can the people. It's a funny thing. We each go off into the world and change and grow and become newer and hopefully better versions of ourselves. We become interested in something new, learn a new way of being, discover things about ourselves we never knew before. But as we change, our memories sort of get stuck, like drying concrete, hard foundations unshifting in our certainty of them. Problem is whatever home is, it's changing and growing and evolving at the same time, too, and it kinda expects you to be the same as you were when you left it. This is true whether you're two miles from where you grew up or a thousand. This is true of your alma mater or your childhood home or your sibling get-togethers. At some level, everyone expects everyone and everything else to fit now in the same place they used to fit.

When I go back to Arkansas, there's always a transition period when I'm happy to be home while also totally uncertain of what home has become. Instead of going back to see what's the same, I see all the things that've changed. The Pizza Hut that became a Mexican place that became a short-order diner now sits empty. The Wal*Mart in the same exact spot but now surrounded by strip malls that never used to be there. The best friend from all my shoolyears that strains to have a pleasant conversation now. I know all those pieces fit in my memory, but either they or my memory have changed them enough that they just don't fit anymore. And that's a hard realization. It's hard to see landmarks of your life become something different. It doesn't matter if it's better or prettier or more sensible; it still hurts to see that someone else didn't love that place the same way you did. And with people, it's real hard. You expect them to be who they once were for you, and they expect you to be who you once were for them. And when who you were and who you are aren't the same anymore, there's inevitable disappointment and tension and maybe even resentment. It's a rare thing to find someone who can reunite with all those changes and still love you.

I wonder what it was like for Jesus to go home? I mean, surely he saw the stable he was born in and remembered all the times Mary and Joseph told him the story of schlepping through the desert only to be turned away by every hotel in town. He may not remember the kings who came to visit, but he's heard the story a thousand times. He probably knows of his dangerous time in Egypt, the sting of his roots bound up with more pleasant memories. Maybe one day he visited Bethlehem and only after passing the spot did he realize the stable had been torn down and replaced with a Dollar General, and he can't help but feel the sting. Or maybe he'd visit Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Zechariah. And he'd remember the times growing up he and John played tag under the olive trees or when Zechariah shared his particular brew of coffee or Elizabeth cleared the table and commented on how much easier it was to see these boys leap together outside of the womb! But the grown Jesus would see that home and mourn the loss of those aging relatives. He'd touch an olive tree and weep for

John who led the way for him. He'd remember leaping but couldn't find it within himself to leap for John now. Too much had changed.

There's that hard line in the Gospel about prophets finding no honor in their hometown. It even goes so far as to say that Jesus could do no signs of power there. I wonder about this, about all the psychological phenomena that converge on us when we go home. Family systems, crabs in a barrel, even unrealistic expectations pile on us and we get kind of stuck. But, while that's all well and good, I don't think this story is about how much like Jesus we are. Instead, I think it's the other way around. I think this story roots Jesus in his humanity. He is so amazingly human that even the forces that affect us affect him. I don't think he couldn't do all that many healings because he was powerless there. No, that doesn't make any sense. Jesus isn't the Son of God because we believe him to be. Jesus is the Son of God regardless of what we believe. No, I wonder if he couldn't do all that much because he just kept running up against all those ways home couldn't live up to what he remembered it to be. All those places and all those people had changed, and so had he, and in doing so, diverged so much that the quality of it all changed. And what a shame! By this point, Jesus is fully living into what it means to be God Incarnate everywhere else, but here, when he's on his home turf, all that people can see is that carpenter kid getting too big for his britches. With all that resistance to what he now fully embodies, it's no wonder he can't wait to get out of town, to leave home stored in the safety of memory, to shake the dust from his sandals and get back to work.

Going home, I know I've had these experiences. I'm sure y'all have, too. I've got kin that can't say my name without growing red in the face. I've got people and places that mean the world to me in my mind but don't exist any longer. I've got some places I need to see and some I can't bear to. And you know, the more I think about it, the less I think it's fair to expect the world to go on not changing just so it can fit to me. We're all meant to change, even our homes change. In other places, Jesus says not even the stones will remain where they are. Everything shifts, but there is a constant in our great story, the story beginning on the first day and stretching all the way to now. That constant, that warmth and caring and love for all that is, that constant is God.

Nostalgia lays an awful lot of unfair expectations on this world, but God can bear all that. Because instead of disappointment in who we have become, in God we are loved as we are found. Not free from the need to do some work, now, but loved as we are nonetheless. If there is a constant home that will always love us, no matter what we've done or who we've become, it's there, under the shadow of God's wing. Or, to bend a quote from St. Augustine, when we find our home, O Lord, may we find our home in thee.