

Hometown Pride, Hometown Rage

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Luke 4:21-30

"...no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown."

Movement 1 – Jesus Comes to Visit

The clergy of a small town heard that Jesus was going to visit their hometown! They were excited! They were beside themselves; Jesus was coming to their home!

This would be bigger than a city council person visiting, this would be bigger than a Mayor visiting, and this might even be bigger than the governor visiting. We saw the excitement and the mayhem that occurred around the royal couple from Britain visiting Philadelphia, but Jesus visiting would be even bigger. What would you do if you heard that Jesus was coming to visit you in your hometown? Would you clear your calendar for the day? Would you cancel your appointment with everyone, even the president? if you knew that Jesus was going to be visiting? What would it be like if you knew that Jesus was visiting?

Imagine this as you hear the scripture reading for today. Imagine the excitement and anticipation you might feel and maybe you can begin to relate with the townspeople of Nazareth. Granted, Jesus did not have the same notoriety that he has now, but he was already growing in fame. He had been baptized, he had begun his ministry and his reputation was growing. Jesus had spent some time in Capernaum performing miracles (although Luke moves that event to just after this one for the sake of programmatic flow). Jesus had already been establishing himself. So the townspeople must have had some level of excitement and anticipation when they heard that Jesus was on his way. They were expecting someone who was clearly touched and blessed by God. They were expecting someone who clearly had some level of power about him. He was coming to their home. Yet to add to the excitement, Nazareth was also Jesus' home. He was their local boy. They could claim him, they could brag and boast about him; he was their boy. He was a hometown hero, and his own, his people were looking forward to his visit with excitement.

Can you relate? It would be as if the president of the United States was a member of this church, grew up in this church, and said he was going to pay us a visit. We would be dancing, we would be overjoyed, and we would be thrilled. When I lived in Dayton, people would get excited every time Martin Sheen came into town. Sheen grew up in Dayton, and came through Dayton every now and again to pick up some local potato chips, (*Mike-sells Potato Chips*) and the town of Dayton swooned. He had returned home, even if it was only for a little while and ripples were felt by the press and the people. This is the kind of excitement the people in Nazareth are feeling, this is the kind of excitement the clergy in that small town feels, and it is the kind of excitement we might feel if we heard that Jesus was coming to visit.

Hometown Pride

What would we show to Jesus? What would we have on our front doors, what clothes would we wear what food would we cook and what would we have to show to Jesus? In that small town, each of the pastors went to work with their individual churches in preparing for Jesus' visit, thinking about these very questions. The Presbyterians prepared an incredible musical Cantata service with organ and orchestra and a full choir. The Episcopalians decided to use their most holy and most formal liturgy for that day, even though it was outside of the liturgical calendar. The Methodists planned a potluck and a revival to have in Jesus' honor. The Baptists, not wanting to be outdone by the Methodists, also planned a potluck and a revival, but prepped their choir to sing in-between each of the seven 45 minute sermons that were planned; it was going to be a day long service. All of the pastors went to work to prepare for Jesus. They wanted to show their best, they wanted to present their finest for the Son of God.

What would we do? What kind of ticker-tape parade would we have for Jesus? What would we point out and show off in our own life? What about your lives are you most proud of? What would you want to show to Jesus first? Where is your hometown pride, where is your personal pride?

Many say that home is “where the heart is,” but I want to suggest to you that home is where you are most comfortable. Home is where you have a set of rituals and rules that make sense to you. Home is a place where you can let down your guard, where you can kick up your feet and where you can relax. Is not this where you would want to encounter Jesus, in the most intimate, authentic and at-ease place in your life? What is your home; to what will you invite Jesus?

In Nazareth, the people meet Jesus in the synagogue. In smaller towns, the synagogue was a place where families gathered, where the townsfolk gathered and where community life occurred; it was in worship in the synagogue that the town was home. It was where the hometown pride was the most evident and the strongest. The Biblical scholar Bruce Malina argues that “in-group loyalty” was a strong connective force in the first century of Palestine, hence the tension between Jews and Gentiles and Samaritans (found in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. By Jerome H. Neyrey). The synagogue was a place where the group loyalty would be strongest among Jews. It was in the synagogue, during worship, where boundaries were understood, where one’s place was known, and where individuals could just relax and be a part of the service. The synagogue was where the town was home. When Jesus read in the temple (just a few verses earlier) he was reconnecting himself with the town, with his home, and with his people. And his people wanted him there in the synagogue; it was where their hometown pride was strongest.

What about you, where are you most comfortable? Where is your home, to what will you be inviting Jesus? Specifically in your spiritual life, where are you home? Is it with the music, the choir and the organ? Would you lift up the preaching? Would you implore Jesus to look at the Thompson Window and hope that he is impressed? Would you show Jesus your prayers, knowing that he would be impressed with your eloquence? Would you show Jesus a time sheet of the hours you have spent in church, knowing he would be impressed with your dedication. Would you show Jesus your cooking or your handiwork? Where does your pride shine and your ease of life rise to the top? Where are you home?

What about the community? We have our “in-group loyalty” as well. We are home when we are worshiping with other Baptists. We are home when the style of the service matches a traditional, classical style. We are home when we are surrounded by people, with things, and with an environment we know and are comfortable with.

What is it that binds us together that we would want to show Jesus? It is something that varies from church to church, from community to community. Some churches are known for their prayer meetings, some are known for their congregational singing, and some are known for their ability to hold the cup of silence. In those moments, the congregations are home. Jesus is coming to visit – what are we going to do for Jesus, where are we going to invite Jesus? We want to invite Jesus to our home, but where is that and what is that. Where is our home with open doors for Jesus?

Movement 3 – In-bread Hometown Pride

What happens is that we often keep Jesus in a safe and comfortable compartment in our lives. What happens when we keep Jesus in our home? We invite Jesus into those parts of our lives that we are proud of, but then we want to keep Jesus there, we don’t want to let Jesus out. We are proud of our sanctuary, we are comfortable in our sanctuary, and we assume that Jesus would be comfortable in our sanctuary just as we are. This is where we experience Jesus best, this is where we will stay, and this is where we expect Jesus to stay.

The people of Nazareth did not want to consider that Jesus would go elsewhere. They did not want to consider that Jesus could leave their home and perform miracles elsewhere. They wanted to keep Jesus

home, they were comfortable keeping Jesus home, reading the safe and saving scriptures, and acting in the safe and expected way. They certainly did not like the idea of Jesus reaching out to other towns, and other groups of people. That idea made them uncomfortable, it made them uneasy. They wanted to keep Jesus home.

Do we want to keep Jesus home?

Maybe we pray in a specific way, and are used to that kind of prayer. We wouldn't want to change in any way at all because this is what we are used to, this is what we are comfortable with and this is where we will stay.

Maybe we are comfortable with a specific style of worship. It is a style we are used to, it is a style that we derive much from, and we wouldn't want to move from that style. It is where we meet Jesus and it is where we want to stay.

Let me suggest to you that whatever it is you think you would show Jesus is home for you; it is where you already meet Jesus. Whatever it is you are proud of is home for you; it is where you already touch the divine. It is where you expect to meet Jesus. It is what you expect from encountering Jesus. You wouldn't ask for more, and wouldn't look for less, but can we imagine leaving our home, leaving our comfort with Jesus?

Think about the clergy of the small town. Each of the congregations are doing their own thing. Each group is trying to offer the best of what they do, they are standing on their in-group loyalty, and they are standing on their hometown pride. Why is it that the churches could not work together? Why is it that the pastors could not try to find a way to worship together, to share together and to welcome Jesus as one large group? They wouldn't be home any longer. They wouldn't be comfortable, and they may risk not meeting Jesus at their best. They wanted to meet Jesus in their home.

We're proud of our home. We are comfortable of our home and we hold onto our pride tightly. We hold onto our group loyalty with clenched fists. We look skeptically at other forms of worship, other ways of prayer, and different experiences of knowing Jesus. The early missionaries in the middle of the 1800s went to other countries and to indigenous people here in the States did not just offering Jesus, but offering a specific understanding of Jesus. They offered a way to worship Jesus that was Western and comfortable to them. They offered a way to pray to Jesus that was Western and comfortable to them. Jesuits built cathedrals in Mexico; Methodists built Western style churches in China and Japan, all offering their home-style understanding of Christianity. They rested on their hometown pride and demanded that others take part in their pride and join in their group loyalty. They basically said that to know Jesus, you would have to know him in my home. Have you ever seen the movie *African Queen*? In the beginning of the movie Katherine Hepburn and Robert Morley and Methodist pastor and his sister, are leading a worship service for a handful of uncomprehending natives. Hepburn and Morley are singing western style hymns with a pump organ in a very pious way and Victorian way; it makes no sense to those who have gathered for the service. They do not feel welcome in Hepburn's and Morley's home with Jesus. Yet their Western pride would not let them let go of their home.

Do we do the same? Have we built a fortress around our home, around our spiritual comfort zone in order to keep change out and to keep the status quo in? Do we rest on our pride, our loyalty so much that the thought of experiencing Jesus elsewhere in a different way or in a different place causes our ire to rise, causes resentment to foment? Have we forced Jesus into safe and comfortable compartments in our lives?

Movement 4 – The Harsh Wake-Up of Jesus

Jesus calls us out of our hometown complacency. Jesus calls us to leave our home. Remember that small town that was expecting Jesus. The churches prepared. They were ready, all in their own way, and then the big day came. Ten o'clock and no Jesus. Eleven o'clock and still no Jesus. The Presbyterians and the

Episcopalians had their worship, because they could not conceive waiting past the eleven o'clock hour. The Baptist started the choir singing, and the Methodists put the covered dishes in the oven to keep them warm. Twelve o'clock and still no Jesus. The Episcopalians and the Presbyterians went home disappointed. The Baptists and the Methodists started their preaching, hoping that Jesus would come in halfway through the service. By three o'clock both the Baptists and the Methodists decided to break and eat. At four thirty, the Methodists went home and the Baptists started their evening worship, and still no Jesus. At nine o'clock in the evening, the Baptists called it a day and went home disappointed.

The following Monday all of the clergy meet and compared notes, expecting the other to say that Jesus was at their service. Each one told of their disappointment that Jesus did not choose to attend their own worship and all wondered what happened of the expected and anticipated visit from Jesus. A little later, the rabbi of the local synagogue came into the meeting, unaware of the disappointment of the pastors. "The most interesting person came to worship on Friday night..."

Jesus promised to visit, but when he did visit, he went where no one expected him to go.

Look at what he does in his own hometown. He is in the synagogue, he has just read a powerful passage from Isaiah, and has declared that the passage will be fulfilled. He has claimed his place as a local hero, as one whom the town should be proud of. The pride rises, the pride increases as there is murmuring about the boy Jesus, the son of Joseph, the one who used to run around their square, the one who always was attentive in synagogue services has now grown up. This is their boy, this is their hometown hero, and now he is here to offer them words of power, acts of healings, and fame and glory to the small town of Nazareth. Yet Jesus says no. Jesus turns from the pride; he turns from the loyalty and denies the people. He even brings up their own scripture as a precedent for his actions. He turns to the core of their identity, and uses it as a rationale for his leaving home. This is the norm of prophets, to leave the people. This is what you should expect – that Christ would go to the outsiders and the outcasts.

Imagine if Jesus came to us and said, your worship is fine, but I am going to worship in a different way. Your songs are fine, but I am going to sing different songs. Your sanctuary is nice, but I am going to worship elsewhere. Your home is fine, your pride is fine, but I am stepping outside of your home to a foreign place, to a foreign land. Jesus comes to us and says, "I am not here to sit in your house. I am not here to be in your home. Instead, I am calling you out of your house and into mine." And Jesus uses that which we hold most dear to justify his actions – the Holy Scriptures. He claims our book and uses our book to push us and challenge us in our own complacency.

This is a shocking action of Jesus, because we often fall into complacency with our own scriptures. Kathleen Boone argues that especially conservative fundamentalists read a specific text that comes from the bible but is not the whole bible. They tend to quote the same passages again and again, they tend to read the same sections again and again and look over many other parts of the bible (from *The Bible Tells Them So*). No doubt we do the same. No doubt we look to the same passages again and again, and tend to overlook other passages. How many have overlooked the passages calling us to care for the least of society? How many have overlooked the passages calling us to free ourselves from a legalistic understanding of salvation? How many have overlooked the call for justice, for peace and for mercy in order to hold onto the sword of righteousness? We build the walls of our house with specific scripture, with specific prayers, and with a specific understanding. Yet Jesus is calling us to read all of the text, to understand his entire ministry, and to come to grips that he will not stay in our comfort zone, to leave our home and enter into his. Jesus will not stay in our place of complacency. Jesus will not embrace our hometown pride, but calls us to leave our pride with him.

Movement 5 – The Challenge of the Walk

Will you go with Jesus? Will you walk with Jesus to a different place, to an uncomfortable place, or will you react with anger and resentment as did the people of Nazareth? What will you reply to Jesus' challenge? Will you say, "Our place of worship is just fine? Our songs work just fine. Our prayers are just fine, and we don't need to go to anything different." Or do we walk with Jesus? Do we go with Jesus where he wants to go, not where we want him to go? Do we walk with Jesus?

I don't think it is just a change in the style of worship, the songs, or the prayers, although we need to be open to change. I don't think it will be just a change in where we worship and when we worship. Christ may lead us to an entirely different land. Christ may bring us to an entirely different way of being in relationship with him. Christ goes to Capernaum, a place that had more Gentiles than Jews. It was a place of more outsiders than insiders. This is the house of the Lord! It was a place that was scorned by the Jews and rejected by many, yet that is where Christ goes, for it is the house of the Lord! Elijah and Elisha both ministered to those outside of Israel, Gentiles. We walk with Jesus to those who are outside of the walls of the church, outside of the walls of our society. We walk with Jesus to those who have been scorned and rejected, and then we let Jesus serve in his way and through the outcasts and the scorned, we look for Jesus.

Remember those early missionaries that tried to force their way of Christianity onto native people? It didn't work. Yet local churches did emerge. A church that was true to the cultures of the native people did rise up despite the misguided intentions of western missionaries. Charles Schreier writes about these local theologies, they way they are particular to a specific community, and they way they are still connected to Christ. We can't force our homes onto others, but we can invite them into Jesus' home. It is in that house, the house of the Lord where you can come as you are who you are, and be with Jesus. Can we walk with Jesus with no ownership of Jesus, so that others can meet him where they are, as they are? Can we go even farther and give our home to the others and let them live in it, change it, and make it theirs? Can we offer our space, our worship, and our prayers to Jesus and allow them to be changed? Every time we invite someone to be a part of our worship and our church family we have the opportunity to change if we are open to change. Every time we worship with another church we have the opportunity to change if we are open to change. If we let go of our hometown pride and follow Christ then we will be challenged, stretched, and we will be changed. Let go of your desire to be comfortable, let go of your desire to be safe, and follow Jesus to a foreign land. You may be called to pray out loud, you may be called to serve others, you may be called to go overseas, or go across town, but you will be called from your home to walk with Jesus to the house of the Lord. Will you say yes? Will you go with Jesus?

Movement 6 – The New Home

Go with Jesus, but do not go with fear. Go and be challenged, but go with confidence. You are spreading a message with Christ that proclaims good news to the poor that restores sight to the blind that makes the lame to walk and the captives free. This is a message of the Kingdom of God; this is the place of our new home. It is a home where we are constantly growing and changing for the better, in Jesus. You are inviting people to enter into Christ's house. I'm not asking you to leave this church, but I think Jesus is asking us to let go of anything that holds us down or that holds us back. Our hometown pride can shackle us and keep us from taking a risk into a foreign land. Jesus is calling us to go into a foreign land. In our worship, in our serving, in our sharing, we are called to go into a foreign place, an unseen place and be there with Jesus. We are headed to a new home. It is a home that is the Kingdom of God. It is a home where the poor are made rich, where the lofty are brought low and where the lowly are exalted. It is the Kingdom of God.

It is a home where our pride is not in our prayers, our songs, or our preaching, but in the life we find in Jesus.

It is a home where we no longer boast about windows or doors, fonts or edifices but only about the victory we have all gained through the cross.

It is a home where justice is a commodity of abundance, where righteousness is shared and lived, and where mercy guides all of our actions.

It is a home where all things are made new, where the perishable passes away, where there will be no more tears, except for joy, no more pain, and death will be no more.

It is a home, it is a land that is fairer than day, it is a land where justice reigns. It is our heavenly home, our holy home.

It is a place now we can only see from afar, but walk with Jesus and you will be their, on the shore singing with all of God's children. First the outcast. Second the lowly. Third the poor, the miserable, the suffering, the forgotten, and finally us. This is the Kingdom of God. This is where we are headed.

Our pride is in the perishable. Let us follow Jesus, to the foreign, to the challenges, to the Sweet by and by. We shall all meet, we shall all gather on that bountiful shore.

AMEN