

Sermon July 4, 2021. Why was Jesus rejected in his hometown? By Kit Greaves

Pray

Why was Jesus rejected in his own hometown? Why could he do no deed of power there?

One more question: has anybody heard of Pouch Cove, NFLD / Labrador? If you have, send us a quick comment on Facebook! Pouch Cove, on the tip of the Avalon Peninsula, jutting way out in eastern North America 'First to See the Sun,' is their village motto, Pouch Cove 27 km north of St. John's the capital city of NFLD and Labrador. Johnny Harris, the award-winning Canadian comedian, for ten years Constable George Crabtree of Murdoch Mysteries CBC TV show, is from Pouch Cove, NFLD, or so it says on Wikipedia. I met Johnny Harris at a Tim Horton's in Peterborough a few years back. Very nice guy. Johnny has traveled all across Canada celebrating small towns in a show he hosts on CBC called Still Standing. But, if you check the website for Pouch Cove, population 2169 where he is from, I was surprised to find no mention of Johnny Harris, I'm guessing, their most famous son. Are they not proud of him or do they have lingering memories of his wayward youth? Have they rejected Johnny? Or maybe he was the consummate altar boy at Church. I have no idea.

So let me ask again, why was Jesus rejected in HIS hometown?

The situation was this: Jesus was on a religious roll. When you do three miracles in three days, you are on a religious roll. Two days before, on Wednesday, Jesus had miraculously stopped the storm on Lake Galilee. The next day, on Thursday, the lady who had had a menstrual period nearly every day instead of once a month, for twelve years, was healed. And then the very next thing, Jesus raised a dead daughter, whose parents who were grieving they'd lost her. Yet Jesus raised her and they got her something to eat. Nice touch. Some of you have shared that pain, of a child dying, as many non-Indigenous Canadians are beginning to share the pain of Indigenous peoples with the increasing number of unmarked graves of little ones at former Indian Residential Schools being revealed by ground penetrating radar. So, in the Gospel readings we have three days and three big miracles in a row. Jesus was on a religious roll.

Now we come to the scene of Friday night, and Jesus was coming into his home town and home church. Let me tell you, the service that night was jammed. There wasn't room to park all the donkeys outside. No Covid19 restrictions or masks to wear. They put extra benches up anywhere they could. It was crowded, because the "local rabbi made good" was coming back to town.

Then Jesus preached the sermon (you can actually read part of the text of his sermon over in Luke ch 4), and afterwards, "everyone spoke well of him and wondered at his gracious words." Others exclaimed, "Where did he get all of this!" And still another said, "How did he get so wise?" But yet there were others who murmured and grumbled, "Isn't this the son of Mary who is sitting over there? And aren't those his brothers standing there, Judas, Joses, and Simon? And aren't those his sisters? He is just the kid from Nazareth. You know, the kid who took care of our donkeys once; who watered our animals, who drew water from the well for us to drink. Who did carpentry work with his dad when he was still alive? There was nothing too special about him. Now, he's doing miracles? I knew him when he was in diapers" (sounding like Clarnella and Rose Who from Whoville in The Grinch Who Stole Christmas movie).

And pretty soon, according to the passage, "they took offense at Jesus." That is the key word of the text: offense. In Greek, it is "skandalon" from which we get the word, "scandal" Scandal means

“stumbling block.” A clash began to develop and Jesus said, “A prophet is not accepted in his own home. A prophet is not accepted in his own home congregation.” That was true of the previous famous prophets of Israel like Isaiah and the prophet Elijah and the prophet Elisha, who could do no miracle in their regions because the people didn’t believe in them. Elijah and Elisha had to go elsewhere to find true faith.

It is said today that Facebook gives a false sense of intimacy. You see photos of ‘friends’ and you instantly have inside knowledge about the events of a person’s life you barely know. When you see them in person and say This is what we’ve been up to. They say, Ya, I saw the pics on Facebook or Instagram or TikTok. End of story. False sense of intimacy.

Isn’t that what’s going on? There’s a familiarity with Jesus and his family, a kind of intimacy, on one level, that breeds contempt.

His homies settled on what they knew of him from his past. The power of human memory, of their knowing him from ‘before he was famous’ was more important to them than receiving the deeds of power as coming from God; that was unnerving no doubt, to see the man standing in front of them, the Son of God, the Messiah. Easier to retreat into known categories than to accept Jesus as he really was.

Did you see Michelle’s Children’s talk today? Her girls have two cups: one cup is open on top, and it was easy to pour water in. Second cup has a lid and a straw on top, and it was not easy to pour water in, instead the water spilled all over the counter. Same with Jesus’ power. He was amazed at their unbelief. Their childhood knowledge of him was like a lid blocking true knowledge of Him. Our childhood knowledge of Jesus, mixed with our experience of church, our experience of life can be like a lid, blocking true understanding of Jesus as the Son of God and our identity in Him.

My suggestion is that you look again at Jesus, as if for the first time.

What I’m hearing in today’s Gospel reading from Mark 6 is this: if familiarity breeds contempt, then friendship, true friendship with Jesus brings compassion.

Jesus moves on from his hometown experience of rejection. What does he do next? He and the disciples who listen to his teaching, accept the authority he gives them. They look with compassion on people in pain in the other towns and villages they visited. They were sent not to injure, harm or hurt but to lift up, to anoint, to pray, to liberate, to heal.

They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. This is the cup, full to overflowing with God’s love, power. Double dose freedom against me-first, oppressive, evil powers that seek to steal, kill and destroy. Friendship that Jesus brings shows compassion.

A group of men invited me as their Pastor in another parish, to their monthly meeting, to share, so I thought, suggestions for how we could promote the Church at a local street festival. However when I got there, their agenda was different. There was a prepared statement one member read criticizing changes that had been made to the church services, accusing me of things that were a shock to me. I was disappointed, hurt and felt the power game reflected a negative, divisive spirit. Most of the group soon left our church. Three of the dozen or so men later stood by me and didn’t go along with what was being said or how it was being said.

What's amazing about this story is what happened years later. I was serving on Diocesan Council in Toronto where this same man who had been so negative and critical of my leadership was also serving. He needed a ride home and would I drive him? The Spirit helped me say yes. During the drive home, he told me how his grandson had been ill, how they had tried everything and begrudgingly he thought, he'd go one Sunday morning to ask for prayer of the prayer team at a different Church where he had been attending. Lo and behold, the very next week the doctor's news about his grandson was remarkable, no sign of the illness and he was thinking of attending a bible study and would his grandfather like to come? Equally shocking but a beautiful turn around. He apologized to me in the car. His experience of God and worship had opened up. He understood what I had been trying to do years before. What had been a source of pain for me and my leadership now turned into an affirmation of faith, of God, of healing. I asked him if he'd give a testimony one Summer Sunday at his former church and he did. He had a profound new friendship with Jesus that opened his heart toward a new compassion.

In John's Gospel, Jesus declares, "I no longer call you servants; I have called you my friends".

Nicky Gumbel, renowned for establishing the Alpha course over thirty years ago in England, gave a talk on the power of friendship at a Leadership Conference a few years back.

"Friendship is the key to life and the key to relationship," he declared. "Love permeates the New Testament, and in some cultures, friendship is considered to be the highest form of love.

"In the Garden of Eden in the beginning, Adam and Eve walked with God in intimate friendship; God said it's not good for man to be alone. But with the Fall came the damaging of friendships and causing the breakdown of relationships. And then Jesus came. He laid down his life for his friends; and restored us to friendship with God."

Gumbel went on to assert that Jesus's entire ministry was, in fact, built on friendships, and on relationships with people. "Friendship leads to fruitfulness. The most important thing we can do is build friendships," he said.

As in Paul's letter to the Philippians, friends show a genuine interest in others. A genuine interest. That very thing is happening with our small group on Monday nights who are studying Philippians online. We are growing as friends, as believers, over Zoom; we don't want to miss Monday night together!

"People will check out a church online or come to church in person for many reasons, but they will stay for usually for one reason - friendship. People aren't looking for a friendly church; they're looking for a church where they can make friends."

And if we are serious about the task of reconciliation set before the Church, and before our country of Canada and in the racially divided and politically polarized United States, then friendship has a vital part to play. It is the key to social action and transformation; any other approach is patronising. Through friendship, we could see closer unity in the Church, and across Canada with Indigenous and Non-indigenous peoples, becoming friends, who grieve together, who laugh together, who heal together.

This model of diversity and unity we are working toward in our vision and mission of Christ Church Oshawa. We have varying beliefs and are able to come together to worship the same God. Jesus built everything on friendship. Friendship allows love to flow more effectively. Friendship brings compassion.

So, two action steps worth considering: who can you reach out to, to encourage today? Whether an old friend, a new friend, a church friend, someone from work or school, who can you reach out to? Your friendship, if genuine, prayerful and sustained might be the reason someone discovers they are loved, by you and by God. Secondly, consider taking the Alpha course. Check out Alphacanada.org for free sample videos of the course material. We are hoping to offer the Alpha Course again this Fall. Next week, our Associate Pastor, David Reed will be preaching. We hope you can be with us. Let's pray.

Most gracious God, we humbly ask you for your church to fill it with all truth; in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where anything is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen and confirm it; where it is in want, furnish it; where it is divided and rent asunder, make it whole; remove from us any contempt of that which is holy and good, and make us friends of you and of each other, friends who bring compassion, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Adapted from BCP, pg.

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