

Proper 9 in Year B, July 4, 2021
Christ Church Valdosta, GA
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If I were to title my sermon today, that title would be: *Will the real Jesus please stand up?*

In today's Gospel, Jesus travels to his hometown of Nazareth where, no doubt, reports of his teachings and his healings have been heard. As is Jesus' custom, on the Sabbath he goes to the Synagogue to pray and to teach. Luke tells us more information than Mark here: an attendant hands Jesus the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and read the following passage:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." He closed the book and sat down. And he began to say to them: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus identifies Himself as the fulfillment of God's prophetic plan. His hearers, who *you think* would warmly welcome a homeboy made good, were astonished, skeptical, unbelieving, and angry. Where did he learn these things? Where did he get this wisdom? He's just the carpenter, the Son of Mary. Luke tells us they were so outraged at his claims that they rose up and put him out of the city and wanted to throw him off the nearest cliff. His own did not recognize Him for who he was.

Many of you might remember a game show back in the 60's called "To Tell the Truth." Gary Moore was host, the celebrity panel included Bill Cullen, Peggy Cass, Gene Rayburn, and Kitty Carlisle (who always wore necklaces, broaches and bracelets provided by Van Cleef and Arpels). The basic premise of the show was that three people came on stage all claiming to be the same person. The four celebrity panelists would then ask them a series of questions in order to find out which person was telling the truth. To end the show, each celebrity would vote for who they thought was the real person and then the real person was asked to stand up.

Now imagine that show this way. Three men walk out all wearing long robes, worn sandals, and sporting beards. The host says: “Welcome our three contestants. Tell us your name please. All three contestants reply: ‘My name is Jesus of Nazareth.’ It gets better because you, the people of Christ Church, are now on the panel asking questions. What kinds of questions will you ask? Will you be looking for certain kinds of answers? The point here, like the point of the Nazareth visit, is how well do we know the “real” Jesus?

Last week we saw how Jairus and the woman with the hemorrhage were examples of acceptance and faith and they fell at Jesus’ feet. Jairus and the woman were acknowledging, based on what they knew, the authority of Jesus. The people at the synagogue only knew the one homegrown; their familiarity with Him ultimately made Jesus unfamiliar to them.

What about us. Who is the real Jesus? Let’s go back to our game show for a minute. You have the opportunity to now ask the questions of each Jesus contestant. Let’s take some example questions. Why is there evil in the world? Why do some good people suffer so much and others who are evil, don’t? How can I know that is an eternal life and will I go there? Why don’t you answer my prayers?

Of the three, would the real Jesus be perfectly obvious? Every day we react to Jesus the way that we see and think of Him. And while it may not be wholesale rejection, or contempt, all of us, at some time, probably wrongly define Him. It is easy to make Jesus into something that He is not by adjusting our image of Him to suit our own needs. There are things in our lives that we do not want to change, ideas we don’t want to vision, priorities we do not want challenged, control we do not want to give up ... and we make Jesus fit into our molds. But when Jesus speaks with authority, do we see and hear Him and obey him? The people of Nazareth could not.

Jesus could do no mighty works in Nazareth except for the few who truly believed. It was not because Jesus could not do those works. It was because the people did not believe. Jesus did not perform miracles to make people believe. Jesus' mighty works take place in the context of faith and the results are blessings that define the Kingdom of God.

Soon you will begin your search for a rector. Let us be open to new possibilities for Jesus and his mighty works. Be open to change, risk, possibility. Is Jesus so familiar that he becomes unfamiliar? Do we place limits on who He can be? The Lord Jesus died for the very ones who took offense at him in order to remove the offense of sin. He died to give us eyes to see Him for who He is: the Son of the Most High God. He died and rose again so that we could confess Jesus as Lord. He came into the world to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

Will the real Jesus please stand up?

And forever dwell in our hearts, our minds, and our souls.

Amen.