**MARK 6:1-6**

**HOMETOWN ZERO**

 Jesus “could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them” (v.5). What a weak Jesus we seem to have. He could do no mighty work there. It’s not that He did nothing. He taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and He even healed a few sick people, but He could do no mighty work there! He could do mighty works in other places, but not there Why is that?

 Is it that God needs our faith in order to do things? Is it Jesus plus us that accomplishes mighty things? Jesus did marvel at their unbelief. Maybe they needed to believe more before God could work through Jesus to do mighty things in their lives. Maybe they had sinned too much, and that’s why He could do no mighty work there. Is that why you’re sick or having problems? You sin too much, don’t believe enough, strongly enough or correctly enough?

 No that’s not the answer. Jesus is God. Jesus doesn’t need our faith to do miracles. The disciples cried out to Jesus questioning Him if He cared about them as they were being swamped by a storm. Sure, they had enough faith to know that Jesus could do something about the storm, but they didn’t fully trust Him and questioned if He cared. And yet Jesus still calmed the storm likely saving their lives and making the journey more pleasant for them and the people in the other boats, who may not even have prayed. And what about the dead people whom Jesus raised. Dead people don’t have faith. It’s not like they were lying there, hoping and praying that Jesus would raise them from the dead.

So, let’s ask the question another way. Does Jesus reward faith? Are you more blessed than other people because you’re a Christian? Not likely. In fact Jesus said that Christians will be persecuted and face more hardships and even be hated because they have faith in Jesus. Just look at Paul from our Epistle reading. He wasn’t rewarded for his faith or repeated prayers.

Paul said, “So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

 A third and more likely answer as to why Jesus could do no mighty work there is that He chose to not do mighty works there as an act of grace towards the people of His Hometown. To say that may not make any sense to you until you hear another passage from the Bible.

So listen to these words from the Gospel of Matthew (11:20-22). “Then He began to denounce the cities where most of His **mighty works** had been done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the **mighty works** done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.”

 Mighty works had been done in Chorazin and Bethsaida and yet they didn’t repent, and thus judgement day was going to be more severe for them. For many Bible scholars the understanding is that Jesus chose to not give many signs of His divinity to those hometown people who scoffingly dismissed Him. He was doing this as an act of grace and not resentment.

 We react in resentful ways when people are rude to us, or hurt our feelings, or refuse to help us. We respond with bitterness in our hearts and say things such as, “Fine, I won’t help them when they need help!” We might even hope that something bad happens to those who aren’t nice to us. You might even take joy in seeing people who hurt you suffer later on, and think they’re getting what they deserve for not being nice to you.

 God doesn’t treat us that way. The people of Jesus’ hometown received Jesus as a Hometown Zero, and not a Hometown Hero. There was no town parade for Him, other than the one where they tried to throw Him off a cliff. There were no parties, except with the tax collectors, prostitutes and other sinners. There were no statues or plaques in His honour except for the cross and plaque above His head which were to come later on. Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews – and Pilate wrote that for Jesus, not His hometown folks.

 No, they didn’t understand who Jesus was. They were astonished at His teachings because Jesus spoke with authority, not quoting other Rabis. ‘Who taught Him these things that He said?!’

 I’m not speaking off the top of my head when I preach. I search the Concordia Study Bible for understanding. I read a commentary by Dr. Naomichi Masaki a Professor of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne Indiana. I also listened to a podcast discussion on this text by Drs. David Schmitt and Peter Nafzgar, professors of homiletics at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis all before writing this sermon, and I do similar research for all other sermons that I write. Jesus just spoke, with authority, from God.

 Now while the Hometown folks saw Jesus as a Hometown Zero, and not the Hometown sports Hero, asking “Is this not the carpenter?” I see Him here more as the Hometown Referee, showing favouritism to His hometown.

 Do you remember the woes and judgment that Jesus foretold for Chorazin and Bethsaida. Those seminary teachers whom I referred to see Jesus as graciously holding back on miracles so that His hometown people won’t be condemned for rejecting the miracles and not repenting. Here the hometown ref is saying, ‘I’m not going to give you a penalty, but rather just a talking to, a warning, and hopefully next time you’ll behave better.’

 Better than what? Taking offense at Jesus. Too many people, people who even consider themselves to be Christians, take offense at Jesus’ Words. Us Christians can now be seen to be the hometown folks. The non-Christians are those from Tyre and Sidon, those for whom Jesus says things will be more bearable for them on judgement day. For us we had better learn to not take offense at Jesus’ words.

 And so that’s what Jesus focuses on here, His words and not His miracles. That you believe in Jesus is a miracle in and of itself. You don’t need a physical, visible miracle for you to believe. You believe because the Holy Spirit worked through the Word of God and enabled you to believe. And so from our reading we see Jesus begin with teaching in the synagogue, and end with Jesus teaching among the villages as He left His hometown.

 What Jesus said in those other villages around His hometown would likely get back to His hometown. So, while they didn’t listen to Him while He was there, they might listen to those who came and said, ‘Do you know what Jesus said when He was in our town?” The normal response is to say, “No, what did that person say?’ Often when we won’t listen to someone directly, we like to listen to what other people have to say about them. So as our reading goes on Jesus sends out the twelve disciples two by two to testify about Him in other villages and towns, a process that continues to this day with pastors coming into your town to teach you about Jesus.

 What we need to realize is that Jesus didn’t come in judgement. He came to bring grace and salvation. If you want to understand Jesus’ feelings towards those who listen to His words, whether hometown folks or you, and your reactions to His words, then listen to Him from the Gospel of John (12:47-50).

“If anyone hears My words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority, but the Father who sent Me has Himself given Me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.” Amen.