

HOMETOWN BOY
Mark 6:1-6

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Sometimes some really big people come from some really small towns. Matthew McConaughey is from Uvalde, Texas – population of 16,000 people. He’s the youngest son of an oil pipe supply business owner and a substitute teacher.

Meryl Streep hails from Summit, New Jersey, home to 21,000 residents. That’s about the same number of Academy Awards she’s won, I think.

Julia Roberts was born October 28, 1967, in Smyrna, Georgia. She loved animals and wanted to be a veterinarian when she grew up.

Demi Moore was born in Roswell, New Mexico, on November 11, 1962.

McComb, Mississippi is famous (or infamous) for Britney Spears. Her singing debut occurred at age five when she sang “What Child is This?” at her kindergarten graduation.

And how about Brad Pitt? Shawnee, Oklahoma. But he was raised in Springfield, Missouri, where he attended Kickapoo High School. He once moved refrigerators for a living.

And there was a day when Patrick Dempsey –that is “McDreamy” – wasn’t always so dreamy. The Lewiston, Maine, native placed third in his age group at the National Jugglers Convention as a teen, and he aspired to attend clown college. The population of the town is 38,000 people.

Oprah Winfrey is from – I can’t even say it – rural Kosciusko, Mississippi, population 7,372. She’s not from Chicago. Don’t be fooled.

Josh Hutcherson from *The Hunger Games* was born in Union, Kentucky, which currently boasts of a population of 5,379.

A really small city in Montana – Ismay, Montana – changed its name to Joe. Therefore, they can say they live in Joe, Montana – named after the NFL quarterback, of course. The vote to change the town’s name was 21-0. It would have been a unanimous 22-0, but one resident was out of Ismay – or should I say out of Joe, Montana – traveling at the time.

Yes, sometimes cities are proud of their residents. But Nazareth, I’m afraid to say, wasn’t so proud of Jesus. In fact, He “could do” few miracles there because of their “unbelief” (6:5).

In Mark's fifth chapter, Jesus is on a roll. He casts the demons out of the demoniac who lived among the tombstones, causing a whole herd of swine – 2000 of them – to do a high dive into the sea. In another instance in chapter 5, a lady who has had a hemorrhage for 12 years simply reaches out and touches the hem of Jesus' garment, and He was able to do what all the physicians had not been able to do. And then, the miracle of miracles – Jesus called Jairus's daughter up from the dead and gives the 12-year-old little girl back to her parents. "Don't be afraid," He says to the father of the dead little girl. "Only believe" (Mark 5:36). And, earlier in chapter 4 we see that even the sea must be still at His command.

Is there anything Jesus can't do? "Hush. Be still," He says, and the sea becomes as smooth as silk. "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit," He exhorts, and the demons dive into the depth of the sea. Why, even touching His garment can cure calamity. And then, command of commands, "Little girl, I say to you arise," and even the dead sit up and take notice of the powers of this Jesus.

When you read Mark's gospel for the first time, having read through chapter 4 and chapter 5, you can't wait to get to chapter 6. What miracle is left after the miracle of the resurrection of the little girl? What great wonders are to be found as we begin the sixth chapter, as Jesus travels on to Nazareth, His own home town? If He can work those kind of miracles among strangers, just imagine what He can do among His own. If a weary woman has enough faith to believe that simply touching His garment will make her well, can you imagine the great faith that is going to welcome Him as He becomes the hometown hero? NOT.

Look at chapter 6, verse 1

And He went out from there, and He came into His home town; and His disciples followed Him.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus is always on the move. He intends to proclaim the message throughout Galilee. Mark's already told us that in chapter 1, verses 38-39. He tries to escape the pressing crowds several times (3:9; 4:36, 6:31; 6:45-46). As he moves on, now back to Nazareth, He goes to the synagogue to teach. "Hometown" is *patris* – fatherland, as opposed to *polis* – city (Hebrews 11:14-16).

And they were amazed at His message – hearing His message and marveling at His miracles. They ask the question of source in verse 2: "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"

"By His hands" suggests that his hometown folk do not think of Jesus' talent coming from the human level. No, he is being used as the channel for some supernatural power. Sounds too much like the scribes of 3:22 who concluded His power is from the evil one.

Turn back to chapter 1, verse 27. Jesus is in Capernaum. Notice. "And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority!'"

Mark 6:1-6 sounds like an echo, a repeat of 1:27-28. The reader thinks he knows where this story is going, only for it to take a nasty, unsuspected, turn.

Yes, in chapter 1 (1:27) the crowds in Capernaum ask. “What is this new teaching?” In chapter 2, verse 7 – notice the question. Because Jesus has claimed to be able to forgive sins, the question is, “Who is this.”

Now, in chapter 6, the question is not so much “what is this teaching” or “who is this man,” but “from where is this power.”

Jesus is in his old stomping ground, and the townsfolk believe they know all there is to know about Him and His family background.

“Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him (v. 3).

We know this guy. He can’t be teaching like that. He can’t be doing these miracles. Why, isn’t He the carpenter?

My plow was broken once, and He fixed it.

Why, He built a set of yokes for me, another one thought.

He fashioned my cupboards, a lady whispered to another.

He made the cross beams for my shop, pondered a man.

He had done work for all of them – window lattices and doors and benches and cupboards and stools, yokes and plows. He was the carpenter in Nazareth. They recognized Him. They knew His mother, Mary. They knew His brothers, Jacob and Joseph and Judah and Simon. (All of His brothers have names of biblical patriarchs. James equals Jacob, and others are named after Jacob’s sons.) It’s interesting to note that while boys were normally identified as sons of their father, He is identified as Mary’s son. Perhaps Joseph is already dead. But ordinarily, even the name of a dead father is used to identify a son. So there is more here. Jesus’ mother’s name is used as a slur against his legitimacy (see John 8:41). Not being sure about the identity of His father, they use Mary’s name.

We know He’s a carpenter. We know His mother. We know his brothers. We know His sisters. This is just a hometown boy. They imagine to themselves they have pegged the preacher.

If you read Mark carefully, at this point you know there is an irony in what they say. He really isn’t Mary’s son, in the real sense. For Mark, Jesus is the Son of God. He tells us in chapter 1, verse 1: “In the beginning, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” He tells us again in verse 11: “and a voice came out of the heavens: ‘Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.’” We find it again in chapter 9, verse 7, and chapter 15, verse 39. And Jesus has already made it clear that really, Joseph and Jacob and Judah and Simon aren’t His brothers. His brothers are those who do the will of the Father. In chapter 3, verses 34-35, He says, “Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

Yes, they think they have Jesus pegged. But they don't know who His real brothers are. They don't know His real lineage. Just when they think they know it all, they know nothing. Moreover, oddly enough they are not put off by what He taught. Their questions have to do not with "What is this new teaching?" or "Who is this man?" but rather, "Where did He get this teaching from?" They are put off by his familiarity, not by what He says.

How can someone so ordinary do the extraordinary? It's almost as if the Nazarenes, themselves, have been sold on the jokes. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" I guess not if those who lived in Nazareth don't even think so.

It's true. The expert at the conference is usually the one who's traveled the greatest distance. To them, Jesus is a local-yokel. They know Him all too well. They know His family. He's a manual laborer to them.

According to *Sirach* 38:24-34, the wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure to study while the laborer is too much engaged in sweat to become wise. The laborer works night and day, and only talks about his skill, his task, his work. Therefore, "they do not sit in the judge's seat, nor do they understand the decisions of the court; they cannot expound discipline or judgment. And they are not among the rulers." They are offended that Jesus, who they have pegged as a nobody, acts like He is a somebody.

Jesus recalls the old saw that a prophet is without honor in his own country. Plutarch has said, "The most sensible and wisest people are little cared for in their own hometown." For the first time in this gospel, the term "prophet" is applied to Jesus. Jesus has come like a prophet (v. 4). He is rejected like a prophet. And the saying begins to foreshadow that He will suffer the inevitable fate of a prophet, the martyrdom of the prophet – just like John the Baptist. Moreover, playing at another level in Mark's gospel is the fact that this rejection by His hometown will mean the rejection by His own people Israel, which will culminate at Jerusalem with His crucifixion. The opposition to Jesus slowly gathers steam in Mark.

They think they know who Jesus is. But they don't know anything about Him. In Mark's gospel, those closest to Jesus are the ones who really miss who He is.

That terrifies me. It should terrify many of us. Am I in danger of being so close that I cannot see? I, like they, grew up with Jesus. I met Jesus when I was about a day old. Like some of you, I was on the Cradle Roll of the church, was raised with Jesus by my side. I knew His story so well. I've spent a lifetime of learning and listening about Jesus.

Yes, like the folk in Nazareth, I grew up with Jesus. Many of you did too. And while I would have it no other way, and see the pattern repeated with my children, sometimes I worry. Am I in danger of being so close that I cannot even see?

If I'd been there, what would I have noticed about Jesus? A lot of different people watched Jesus and came to their own conclusions. Some said He was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. He'd accept anybody's invitation to dinner, and His list of friends ranged from rich tax collectors to poor prostitutes. People liked being with Jesus. He was a joy to be with. Yet some people said

He had a devil. He claimed to be the Son of God, yet He ate and drank like other men, got tired, lonely.

What would I have noticed? What would I have thought about Jesus? A guy who could shout to the weather like He was correcting an unruly child. This man who made lame men walk, blind people see, exorcized demons from the demented soul among the graves. Yet, they scratched their heads, flabbergasted. “Isn’t He Mary’s boy? Isn’t this the carpenter? Where did He get such wisdom and such power?”

Yet, other people were so amazed at His teaching that they flocked to Him. He had to be put into a boat and pushed offshore so He could teach. Yet, while the foxes have holes and the birds have nests, the Son of God had no place to lay His head.

Mark 4:11-12

And He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.”

His words were short, precise, terrible, and full of refreshment. People were taken with Him. Yet, He didn’t even have enough money to pay His taxes and had to send Peter fishing. This Jesus, who talked in parables about a scolding woman wearing down the patience of a judge, a king who plunges into an ill-planned war, or about a single woman who loses a penny and acts like she has lost everything. Or a story about a father who scans the horizon every night for some sign of his wayward son.

Yes, what would we have thought about this Jesus who has so much emphasis on grace, and yet somehow never waters down the holiness of God? This Jesus who claimed to be God. Even when they send the guards to seize Him, they return to the Temple empty-handed. “No one ever spoke the way this man does,” they said, awed by His presence. This rabbi who says that He and the Father, God, are one. This teacher who claims to have the power to forgive sin and be able to rebuild the Temple in three days.

Where would I have been in the story? Where would you have been in the story? Are we in the story today, like those in Nazareth, in danger of being so close that somehow we can’t see the forest for the trees? Are we in danger of being so familiar, in danger of thinking we know everything when, in reality, we know nothing?

What are we to make of Jesus?

A terrible thing happens in Nazareth. Look at verse 5.

And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief.

Their cynicism about Jesus limited the Lord. They didn’t bring their sick to Him for healing. Only a handful did so, and He healed them.

Are we in danger of limiting the Lord?

I'm amazed every time someone who has been raised as a Christian, with the gospel of the apostles, goes for another world religion. How can someone leave the faith of their youth, if it is the faith in Christ, for foolishness? Are they so familiar with the stories about Jesus that it breeds contempt? Has this story for them become so humdrum? Have they lost their sense of awe? Does our fascination with the unfamiliar and exotic lead us to look for truth in what is new or different?

Are we too close to see?

Will we join the citizens of Nazareth in saying, "Don't we already know this Jesus? Hasn't He been around us for a long time? He can't really make any difference in our lives." We'll take the attitude of those in Nazareth, and we'll miss the blessings of God – this God who has cast out demons, this God who has commanded the sea, this God who has healed the hemorrhage, the God who has raised the dead will now pass us by. While he'll do wonders for those to the left of us and those to the right of us, among us He'll be able to do very little.

We need to pledge ourselves, individually and corporately, to expecting great things from God. Praying for those who are sick, with prayers of faith that leave room for God to heal. Praying for those who are lost, as if they might really proclaim the Lordship of Christ. Stop trying to control things so much in our own lives, and let go and let God – quit limiting the Lord.

Do you have eyes of faith? Eyes to see? Faith that reached out to touch the hem of His garment that you might be healed? Or cold eyes of cynicism, doubt?

So you yourself are sitting in the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus is teaching. And you say?