

Donohue Sermon July 5, 2009

Homecoming

It is a familiar phrase. A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown. You can't go home again. Familiarity breeds contempt. Our culture is rife with variations on this classic principle of human relating.

Today we continue in Mark's story of the earthly ministry of Christ. In this chapter Jesus has come back across the sea of Galilee, after performing an impressive series of miracles, including the healing of a hemorrhaging woman and a very sick 12 year old girl. But now, now that he has stepped onto his home turf, is in his hometown among his own kin, suddenly his ministry falters. Friends and family criticize him, mock him and take offense.

But Jesus' hometown problem was not so much his works as it was his words. Jesus, the miracle man, had a message. Repent and come back to God, who adores you. Be restored. Stop destroying yourselves and one another in desperate attempts to meet your ego needs and to pacify your fears.

This combination of power and proclamation placed Jesus in the long line of Hebrew prophets. A "prophet" in the Judeo-Christian tradition is anyone who is given power and authority to receive God's Word and communicate the Word to others. The prophet's primary mission: to be a thorn in the side of God's people, to call them back to love of God and neighbor.

And this was the message of the prophet Jesus to his friends, family and neighbors. Who does this guy think he is? We know who he is; he's Jesus that carpenter's son from down the road. Wait wasn't he that "miracle baby," you know the one *God* put in his mother's womb.

Yea, and didn't he run away from home a couple times? I don't know, I just remember that he was always falling off his bike. Wait *this* guy is saying that God, his "father," wants us to change? And sent *him* to tell us so. Now that is offensive.

Jesus miracle worker, teacher and prophet comes home after a time of powerful ministry elsewhere, and finds that his power to speak for God is limited in the company of his friends and family.

I am wondering how many of us found the same to be true yesterday, at fourth of July celebrations. No matter our personal growth through the years, our moral regeneration or spiritual maturation, when we're back at the lake house, we're twelve. We all are as we always were, firmly ensconced in our familiar roles. Uncle Jimmy is drunk. Cousin Sue from down the street is still trying to get mom to buy and sell Avon. Dad knows all and all know it. And we

know our place. And it is certainly *not* to call people back into loving relationship with God and one another.

Never mind that we spoke last week at an intimidating corporate event imploring business leaders to curb their consumption of precious natural resources, that we've tirelessly lobbied for low income housing, that on Wednesdays we counsel strangers over domestic violence hotline. No, never mind all that because here at this picnic our sails luff, our confidence wanes and we sink effortlessly back into our old familiar roles.

Here, by the grill, between the cooler and the volleyball net, we are not likely to call on those around us to cease their destructive behaviors, to look for Christ in one another or to honor the dignity of every human being.

The bold among us, given the right circumstances, *might* find the courage to slip into the house and bring out a second trash bag for recycling. But we're certainly not going to put a *sign* on it. That would be offensive.

We live bound by human patterns and defenses. We endure them, willing to live as liars for a time, just while I'm at home because, well, its easier that way. We are constrained and we constrain. We make very little room for spiritual growth, and almost none for overt religious sentiment.

So, what's the point. Its really tough to speak of God at home. Jesus had trouble and so will you. Don't worry you're in good company.

No. It is truly awesome that we have a God who took on human likeness, and can empathize with all of our struggles, including this one...but lets not forget what happened between this homecoming, related by Mark, and yesterday's bar-b-q--the death and resurrection of Christ.

Easter morning death and fear were vanquished. We were liberated once and for all from our fear-driven demoralizing patterns of human relating. Patterns that stifle our growth and crush our spirits. All of these, rendered powerless, Easter morning.

So how do we live into this?

Well, Saint Ann's is its own kind of kin and hometown. A kind of family. In the coming months this family is going to have to pull together and look at itself. Yourself. You will need to examine where you have been and where you want to go as a parish. You will need to figure out who you are. As you approach this process you may come with particular roles and assumptions in your mind about people's competence and spiritual maturity. Many of you have been here long enough to settle in to distinct roles. My challenge to you all today, good people of Saint

Ann's is for you to pray for the ability to listen to what God has been doing in this place and in each one of you. To do that you will all need to be as truthful as possible with yourselves and with one another. You will need to make as much room as possible for one another to express spiritual things. You need to make this a space where it is OK to talk about God, to testify to God's movement in your lives, including the moves in the shadows.

Now is the time to refrain from gossip and judgement, and to step forward boldly, despite our fears of the same. And when you fall into sin, to repent and return to the Lord, as you've promise in the baptismal covenant.

If you do not find this courage, you will likely come up with a good candidate, someone who will teach and offer exquisite pastoral care. But if you do risk, submit and open yourselves in these ways, your relationships with God and one another will be remade into something even more incomprehensibly beautiful. A beauty that will be enhanced and nourished by the person you invite to share some of that journey with you.

Pray. Listen. Speak of God. Make space for the prophetic voices who would call you to your higher selves. And get ready to be astonished by the spirit's presence and power here. Right here in this place. Here in the heart of the family of Saint Ann's in Old Lyme CT.