

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM
July 9, 2017

Mark 6:1-6 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?"³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

⁴ Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Be Amazed with Jesus!

This is the point in the year when baseball is wrapping up for the amateurs. So fans and parents and coaches who have called bleachers their second homes for the past few months have a pretty good idea who the best teams and best players are. In the professional ranks, you would think it would be even easier to identify the best. But when the major leaguers gather for their All-Star game this week in Miami, there will be plenty of discussions. We know which teams have the best records. But which ones have the best chance of making the World Series? We know who will be the starters for the All-Star game. But which ones got snubbed? Who really deserved to be recognized at the best at their position?

It is actually quite amazing to get a glimpse into the process for how someone is chosen as an all-star. It doesn't go purely on statistics, using precise numbers crunched by computers. It's not really about facts at all, but more about emotions. These are the players the fans love at this moment. These are the ones people feel are deserving of recognition.

Today's Scripture selection un masks the way human beings react to greatness. When we last saw Jesus, he had just raised a little girl back to life for her distraught parents. Now Jesus goes back to Nazareth, the town where he grew up. On the Sabbath Day, the day for church, Jesus went to his hometown synagogue. He had already developed a following and a reputation in the region. So the leaders of this house of worship asked Jesus to read and teach from Scripture. That's when things get interesting. The people sitting in the synagogue on that Sabbath were amazed. But amazement isn't always absolutely positive. And in this episode, Jesus helps us to come to grips with our own sense of amazement. Jesus confronts us with some ugly reactions so we can embrace Jesus with the most beautiful kind of amazement. Be amazed with Jesus!

Amazement at Jesus should be a beautiful aspect of faith. But it isn't always. Sometimes it is just an overwhelming reaction, somewhere between shock and awe and confusion. In Nazareth, the hometown crowd was actually upset. We can say they were amazed because of Jesus.

They know Jesus. They know his whole family. His entire childhood was acted out in front of them. His background is pretty plain and simple. But this is how they react: **“Where did this man get these things?’ they asked. ‘What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?’”** (Mark 6:2) They are trying to be as insulting as possible. They had never seen or heard anything amazing from him before he left town. So he must be some counterfeit prophet, an imposter spiritual leader.

A little cultural explanation might help to frame their reaction. Honor belonged to communities in finite amounts. So if someone increased in honor, it meant some other family had to get knocked down a peg. You’ve probably seen glimpses of this. Someone returns home after making something of herself, getting an education, getting a job, going somewhere in life. But when they return home, the people left behind do everything they can to cut her down to size. It’s irrational. But it happens. And it helps explain that even though unbelief is irrational, there are sometimes cultural reasons behind that rejection of Jesus.

Let’s take a look at our culture in 21st century America today. In America, the individual is king. You and I know that what I think about Jesus isn’t the most important thing. But that doesn’t really matter much in our culture today. We also know most people in our world have some feelings about Jesus. And, overall, people generally have a positive opinion about Jesus. People feel Jesus is a great teacher, they feel he is interested in their best lives now, they have an image of someone who wants them to be happy, they want to make him into a hero to bring relief to oppression and injustice. Those aren’t necessarily bad feelings toward Jesus. But neither are they really consistent with the facts.

Have you ever had trouble convincing someone of well-established facts? I’m not talking about the best sports teams or athletes. And I’m definitely not touching global warming or immigration. More like when you try to convince someone the world is round and it revolves around the sun. But they just reject your version of the facts. And they don’t even bother to offer an alternative set of facts or try to argue using any proof. They just tell you how they feel. They feel like the earth is flat. They feel like the sun goes around this flat earth. And nothing you can say can change their mind.

But some things don’t depend on how you FEEL about them. The police officer doesn’t care what you feel the speed limit should be. The people of Nazareth acknowledged Jesus’ wisdom and power. But they wouldn’t allow those facts to change their perception of Jesus. And so their emotions led to the most irrational hatred and scorn and dismissive reactions to the obvious wisdom and power of Jesus. The people of Nazareth are amazed at Jesus. They are threatened and offended and reject Jesus without good reason.

Feelings from other people don’t change your definition of Jesus. But feelings from others change the way you live out your faith. You lose your amazement with Jesus. You give in to some skepticism. You lose your joy in living out your identity as a Christian. You go silent when it is time to speak boldly. It’s amazing, but not in a good way.

Unbelief is pretty amazing when you think about it. Rejection of Jesus doesn't have to have good reason. Usually it isn't based on reason at all.

And Jesus has the best reaction to this rejection. He doesn't stoop to their level and respond irrationally, in a purely emotional way. Jesus isn't violent. Jesus doesn't force them into faith or compel them to acknowledge his true identity. That's the thing about freedom. Human free will is capable of refusing and rejecting Jesus. It's like a doctor offering a diagnosis and cure to his patient only to see that patient walk out of the office insulted and determined to live his own life. Jesus is "**amazed at their lack of faith.**" (Mark 6:6)

And here's the part that is truly amazing about Jesus. He knows their insults. He feels their hatred. But he doesn't back down. Be amazed at the focus of Jesus! He speaks the truth: "**A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.**" (Mark 6:4) Jesus identifies himself as the prophet. Jesus is amazing in his dedication to his ministry. Jesus isn't sidetracked. He still shows mercy. Jesus uses his power to heal. Not many, but he still places his hands on a few people in Nazareth to heal them. Then Jesus goes on and goes out from there preaching and teaching.

Be amazed along with Jesus! Let the facts of his wisdom and power sink in to your heart. And not just amazement because of Jesus or strong emotions against Jesus. In Mark's account of Jesus' life and teaching, words and works go together. We don't see that very often. If someone is able to lift one of those huge tractor tires, we don't expect to see him reading War and Peace. Just like we don't expect college professors to be able to take apart a car's engine and put it back together again. But in Jesus, the power and the wisdom go together to give us an accurate picture of who he really is.

People have a positive impression about Jesus. But don't invest yourself too heavily in what the crowd says about Jesus. Don't let them rob you of true amazement with Jesus. The things that are most difficult to believe are the ones that make Jesus so truly unique. You might have to get rid of your gut reaction and over ride your feelings about Jesus.

Jesus is more than a good teacher. He calls himself the Son of God. Jesus wants more for you than happiness. He came to be your rescue. Jesus has something more in store for you than a better life. He came to give you eternal life. All of that is only possible because Jesus was rejected. A political candidate is expected to carry his hometown. If he runs into obstacles and resistance, it's a bad omen for the rest of the campaign. His rejection at his hometown is your rescue. Jesus didn't give up when the hometown folks grew angry at him. Jesus knew his mission was more than trying to become the person people wanted him to be.

Think about it this way. Ever notice how Jesus reacts to his ministry successes in ways that make you scratch your head? He raises Jairus' daughter and then instructs the family not to tell anyone. He feeds thousands and then escapes before they can make him king. When the crowds greet him as a conquering king on Palm Sunday in Jerusalem, he knows it will necessarily bring him into direct confrontation with the Roman military and the Jewish religious leadership. And only when the crowds turn their backs on him and chant for his

crucifixion with hatred in their hearts does Jesus take the final step toward ultimate success.

Good news comes out of his rejection. The best news for you rests on his ultimate rejection. A Jesus who teaches people to be better or gave them helpful hints at ways to improve their behavior never would have run afoul of the Jewish high priest and Sanhedrin. A Jesus who just taught people to get along with each other and find their best life would have never gotten himself executed under Pontius Pilate. Be amazed with a Jesus who was willing to have all the world's hatred and scorn heaped upon him on the cross. Be amazed at your Savior stretching out his arms for the times you aren't willing to risk being labeled unpopular by standing up for his true identity. Embrace with amazement the Jesus who knows your joyless living and your timid testimony and leaves them buried in that tomb outside Jerusalem.

We could go into great details about what an embrace of faith means in technical terms. But one of the best summaries of faith is amazingly simple. Faith means: forsaking all I take Him. Faith isn't just an intellectual acceptance of the facts of Jesus' life and identity. It is an embrace of Jesus bringing him into your whole life with abandonment. Be amazed that Jesus is willing to confront irrational unbelief. Be amazed that Jesus is willing to be unpopular so he can be your Savior. Let that amazement overshadow any desire to have people be amazed and pleased with you. Embrace the facts of what Jesus did for you with all your heart.

You've probably heard of a genealogy or a family tree. But you might not have ever heard of a genogram. A genogram doesn't just map out your family relationships. It diagrams the emotional component to those relationships. Green identifies intimate relationships. Red shows hostile relationships. Blue indicates outright abuses. But if you had to insert your most important relationship, where would you put Jesus? And if you prized that relationship with Jesus above everything else, what would it do to all those other relationships? Jesus won't be stopped by rejection and irrational unbelief. The power and wisdom of Jesus is there for you too. It changes lives. It dominates all other relationships. It's really amazing. Amen.