

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, July 5, 2015

**Local Boy Makes Good --- or Does He?**

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Mark 6:1-13

After the 2014 World Series a young man from Western North Carolina, Madison Bumgarner, became a local hero, particularly in Caldwell County where I live. The local media was replete with news articles of this local boy making good. Sports Illustrated named him as “Sportsman of the Year” for his incredible pitching for the San Francisco Giants in the World Series.

Bumgarner indeed became a local hero in his home town of Lenoir and was honored by many civic organizations for his accomplishments. He came home to praise and local towns wanted to throw parades for him but he refused. He didn’t want a big fuss made about him and said, “They let me know they appreciate it ... This will always be home. It’s a special place ...”

In many ways, Jesus coming home to Nazareth was similar. Lenoir is a small place and everybody knows everybody, almost literally. Lenoir is a middle class working town with a relatively small population. Those folks were looking for a hero, a person they could look up to, and they found their hero in Madison Bumgarner.

Jesus had become a bit famous when he returned to Nazareth, a small town of perhaps 150 to 200 people who, for the most part were poor. He came with his disciples and began to teach in the synagogue. People had heard about him healing people, driving out demons, and raising the daughter of Jarius from the dead. Like Madison Bumgarner, his reputation preceded him, but the local response was markedly different.

People came to hear him in the synagogue. Some were astonished but astonishment quickly turned to suspicion. He was teaching the people he grew up with, including his own family, and their response was totally unexpected.

*“Where did this man get these things?”*

*“What’s this wisdom that has been given to him?”*

*“ What are these miracles he is performing?”*

*“ Isn’t this Mary’s son?”*

At Nazareth, Jesus was questioned. People were skeptical and, at best, all he could do were a few simple cures?

Why? According to Barbara Brown Taylor<sup>1</sup>, *“... he ran into such a wall of disbelief that it incapacitated him. Or rather it incapacitated them, the disbelievers who took offense to him ... He still had power to share with them, only he could not do anything with it because they would not let him. If you have ever pressed a lit match to a pile of wet sticks, then you know what it was like. It does not matter how strong your flame is; what you need is something that will catch fire.”*

But Jesus' family and friends didn't catch fire. To the contrary they sat shaking their heads. Despite the strong start of his ministry, these people couldn't accept that he could be a prophet or even be the long awaited Messiah.

When he came home, he was welcomed and invited to speak. He was the local boy made good. But once they heard him, they became skeptics.

They knew him as the local boy, the son of Mary. Just an average kid. A good carpenter, yes, but a prophet, a healer, the Messiah --- no way.

Their doubt was so great; their faith so weak, that Jesus was ineffective. Each time previously that Jesus had performed a healing miracle he would say something like, “Your faith has made you well” but it didn't work with this crowd --- they didn't have faith.

Jesus had come home and had put himself to a very severe test. People who have known you since you were young tend to be your most severe critics, and these people had known Jesus all of his life.

William Barclay<sup>2</sup> said, *“His teaching was greeted not with wonder but with a kind of contempt. ‘They took offense at him.’ They were scandalized that a man who came from a background like Jesus should say and do things such as he. Familiarity had bred a mistaken contempt.”*

They asked, *“Isn't this the carpenter?”* How could a carpenter ever be a rabbi or a prophet? He was not an educated man. He worked with his hands. *“He was a man of the people, a layman, a simple man”* according to Barclay and they despised him.

He was born to a common life. He couldn't be anything else in their minds. Like people do today, Jesus was evaluated by his background, not by his accomplishments.

On TV millions of people saw what Madison Bumgarner accomplished. The people of Nazareth did not see what Jesus had been doing and were skeptical. No way could a carpenter have done all of the things people said he did.

They also said, *"Isn't this Mary's son?"* Back then people were always referred to as the son or daughter of the father, never the mother. By this question it is logical to assume that Joseph had been dead for some time.

Jesus did not begin his ministry until he was about thirty years of age. Why not earlier? Most likely that was because Joseph had died and Jesus was supporting his mother and his siblings until they were old enough to support themselves. The result was that Jesus was so familiar to the people that they couldn't imagine that there was anything spiritual about him. The feelings were wrong. Faith in him was lacking and that was an impossible barrier.

Barclay said, *"It is still true that no man can be healed if he refuses to be healed ... We may call it faith; we may call it the will to live; but without it no man can survive."*

He went on to say, *"There can be no preaching in the wrong atmosphere. Our churches would be different places if congregations would only remember that they preach far more than half the sermon ... In an atmosphere of critical coldness or bland indifference, the most Spirit-packed utterance can fall lifeless to the earth."*

Barclay's third point was that, *"If men have come together to refuse to understand, they will misunderstand. If men have come together to see no other point of view but their own, they will see no other. But if men have come together, loving Christ and seeking to love each other, even those who are most widely separated can come together in him."*

The people of Nazareth, including Jesus' own family, refused to understand and they shut him out. He left Nazareth never to return and went about the other villages teaching and he sent his disciples out. As our scripture reading says they were much better received elsewhere. *"They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."*

Sermons can be preached week after week in our churches but the sermons are not complete until those in the congregation go out and preach the message of Christ. We need to welcome others to the table.

Will you do that?

*“There is laid on us the tremendous responsibility that we can either help or hinder the work of Jesus Christ. We can open the door wide to him --- or slam it in his face.”*

(Barclay).

**Amen.**

1. Barbara Brown Taylor, Bread of Angels, Crowley Publications, Boston, 1997
2. William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, rev. ed., Westminster John Knox press, Louisville, KY, 1975