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Pentecost Season

Mark 6:1-6

WHEN AMAZEMENT IS NOT A GOOD THING

There is a book entitled Fearfully and Wonderfully: The Marvel of Bearing God's Image. It is a collaboration between Christian author Philip Yancey and Dr Paul Brand. The book explores the miracle of God's creative wisdom that is the human body. Dr. Brand had worked for most of his career with leprosy patients in remote, poverty-stricken regions of India. He describes how it occurred to him as he sat in medical conferences in India among the battle-weary doctors confronting such diseases as malaria, dysentery and typhoid fever that if he had suggested they could eliminate the top ten diseases among their populace merely by recommending lifestyle changes, they could hardly imagine such a paradise. Yet America is such a paradise. Many of the top diseases of our populace could be eradicated without surgeries or vaccines or expensive medications simply by lifestyle changes. Yet, here we are. Those panels of Indian doctors would be amazed, but not in a good way.

The people in Jesus' hometown, His kinfolk, expressed amazement. Their amazement did not reflect a good thing either. Mark chapter 6 says, *Jesus went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 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, that he even does miracles! 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.*

Notice, they acknowledged the beautiful things that came from Jesus' lips and the powerful things that came from His hands. They recognized that these things were real. They were amazed, but not with faith, not with admiration. Their amazement was mixed with contempt. "Where did this guy get these things – this, this carpenter, this kid who used to run through our backyards?" You've heard the saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." And so it was even for Jesus in His hometown.

Before we go any further, let's you and I be amazed, in a good way, that we have a such a God – one who became part of His own creation, fully human except without sin; one who went through the experience of growing up, of having relatives, one who would bother to work with His hands, to learn carpentry, to master the feel of wood - so average was He that the townsfolk didn't recognize His divinity. It reminds me of what the prophet Isaiah foretold about the Christ: *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men.*

No other god comes close to this, takes such an interest in his world as this. No other god went to such trouble for the human race. Allah did not do that. Nor did the great spirit of the Native Americans. Nor did the god of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Those gods are distant and aloof. Not personally and intimately involved with their people. (And yes, they are false gods which do not exist. But it just demonstrates how amazing the true God who really does exist is! No one could have dreamt up such a God.)

The townsfolk were amazed at Jesus, but not in a good way. Then the scenario flipped. Jesus became amazed too, but also not in a good way. Listen again to Mark chapter 6: *Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hand on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.*

We might wonder, if Jesus is God, how is it possible for Him to be amazed at anything. Doesn't He know all things? Here we get a glimpse into the mystery of His person. Yes, according to His divine nature He knows all things. Nothing surprises Him. But according to His human nature He is wired with every human emotion and He is exasperated. It might be like the way you would know what a roller coaster ride is going to be like, but that doesn't stop you from feeling the thrill.

This scenario also gives us a glimpse into the depth of human lostness. The book I mentioned earlier by Dr. Brand, points out that many of the health maladies of an affluent society could be solved just by a change of habits. But even knowing a better choice does not mean we are able to follow it. This is a symptom of our spiritual lostness. You know you shouldn't grouse at your wife, but you still find yourself doing it. In the same way here are the townspeople listening to Jesus, hearing His wisdom, acknowledging His gracious words of salvation – but they are not able to accept His words or to accept Him as their Lord. The Bible says, *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

You and I have that same failing, don't we? God offers to us rescue from death, relief from guilt, peace with heaven, and the glory of His Kingdom – and aren't we so often lackluster about it? We even know church is good for us, Bible reading would be good for us, deliberate prayer would be good for us – good habits to be sure, yet we struggle to make such choices. One wonders how often Jesus is exasperated with us.

Now if that's true for us who have faith in Jesus, then we need not be surprised if the Gospel will be rejected by the world and our efforts to reach out to people will be rebuffed. This is the point of this reading from Mark chapter 6 today. Jesus has commissioned us to be His witnesses here on earth. One way He equips us is with an awareness of the world's resistance to the Gospel. This should help us from becoming dismayed or disillusioned when it happens. All we need to do is look in the mirror.

At the same time, what do we still see regarding our Savior Jesus in His hometown. He still held out the Gospel to these people and by the gracious power of the Holy Spirit a few did believe in him. A few of them were healed.

Let this be an encouragement to you and me. For in spite of our own lackluster hearts, Jesus still holds out salvation to you and me. His whole purpose for becoming fully human was so that He could be our substitute, so that He could take on Himself the full blame for our sinfulness, our inability to choose the good, our slowness to believe – and by His death on the cross He atoned to God for our sins as one of us on our behalf so that God the Father declares you and me and anyone who believes in Him forgiven. Through faith in Jesus we are restored to God and restored to eternal life and restored to a new obedience of joy in serving Him.

It is the joy of His forgiveness that makes us tick, makes us want to keep reaching out with His forgiveness to the world, even if the world rejects it. Sometimes people take pleasure in giving to a charity or giving a gift to someone. It gives them joy. It gives us joy to share the wealth of Christ with the world. And we know it is not a futile effort. Some will believe. Some will be healed. God says in Isaiah: *My word will never return to me empty, but will accomplish the purpose for which I sent it.*

Knowing this, as we endeavor to be His witnesses, we will not be surprised when people reject the truth. Jesus forewarned us of that. Rather knowing the depth of our human depravity, we will be amazed, delightfully amazed whenever someone does believe it. We will treasure it and it will be most satisfying. And that is when amazement will be a very good thing.