

*He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. 4Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." 5And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6And he was amazed at their unbelief.*

*Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." 12So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

For me there is a place on earth that is like no other. I learned this once more just a little over a week ago. We were returning from Colorado, driving on the turnpike toward Exit Seven. I felt the excitement in me rising as we passed Route Four heading east. Landmarks grew more familiar; roads had names that I could name. As we raced by my eyes sought the pond where I caught my first fish, the home where I was raised, the fields I walked with a hoe in my hands. Though I have been gone for nearly twenty-five years those parts of Erie County and the village of Milan and the stone church on Route 250 will always be home. For it was there that I learned of God and people and life and of myself.

Jesus came to his hometown. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue.

I wish that God had chosen to reveal what Jesus was thinking that day. He knew these people. Week after week he had been in the very place where they now stood a rabbi or elder of the congregation opened the scriptures, read, taught.

How had these people treated him through the years? Had he been shunned because of the pregnancy of Mary before marriage? Or had he been accepted as one of them? Had he been popular with his peers? Or a loner, quiet, distant? Had he excelled in synagogue school, or missed most of the classes because of the need to help out at home? Where was he when the village children were up to some mischief, was he with them, or apart? Did he join the laughter when they whispered their jokes, or stand aloof, critical, condemning? Isn't it strange that God

has saved none of this for us, none of this that would help us figure out Jesus? Instead we are only told of a homecoming.

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How could they take offense at Jesus? Sensing his wisdom, his power they could see only a carpenter, a son of Mary, a brother of Mary's children who lived with them in that town. "Where did this man get all this?" they asked. That question could have been a beginning for them.

They could have answered, "He gets what he has, his wisdom, his power from God." Then they might have come to believe that he was more than only son of Mary, but was Son of God. Maybe then they might have learned that Jesus true family was not a biological family but a spiritual family of those who do the will of Jesus' heavenly Father.

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What will we do with all of this? Maybe we will learn.

There are people in our own town, and in our own kin, and in our own home who have been given the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus has named them his sisters and brothers in baptism. But do we look for the hand of God working in them?

When you hear me, do your ears open to one who speaks God's word? When I hear you, do I remember that God's own Spirit speaks through you? If Jesus was hindered from doing mighty works there because they did not believe that God was working in him, how much more will we be hindered when the people around us look for only us but not God in us.

The people who knew Jesus best, ended up knowing him least. Is that the story in our homes, in our church? Do we so remember the weakness that we have seen and experienced in one another, that we cannot see God's power?

Maybe it is just jealousy. They did not want Jesus to stand above them thinking that his successes would make even more clear their failures. If you should have a great experience of

God's power and love in your life, will I feel like it means there is something wrong with me? Like a brother who returns home a success can make the rest of the family feel bitter. What might bring joy, leads instead to division.

What did Jesus do but seek the lost and heal the sick and feed the hungry? In word and in deed he showed God's help to be near, and the unbelieving world hated him for it. Instead of a celebration they greeted Jesus with a cross. John says they loved the darkness rather than the light. Sometimes in one another we love the darkness rather than the light, we find more joy in our sisters and brothers failing and sin than we do in God's power in them.

What will God do with such people as we are?

In Jesus Christ God forgives us all our sins. Not when we were good enough or when we deserved it but while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

And in that forgiveness is a new possibility for you and for me. We can join the celebration that is Jesus Christ. We can recognize that the Spirit of God is at work in our home and our town and our brothers and sisters this very day. Yes we can even believe that the Spirit of the almighty God is at work in this place and in each of us to make us new in Christ - not only you, but the people all around you too.

Whenever I go back to Erie County, the world I remember is there no more. Buildings and roads may be the same, but people have changed and are changing.

St. Paul writes: "If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new. All this is from God."