

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Ezekiel 2:2-5

Psalms 123:1-2, 2, 3-4

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Mark 6:1-6

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The hometown folks are very hard on Jesus in today's Gospel. They not only doubt his credentials as a prophet, they are downright insulting. In Jesus' day it was customary to refer to a man as the son of his father. So when people in the crowd refer to Jesus as the son of Mary, they are casting aspersions on him, and on his mother.

This must be one of the first recorded examples of familiarity breeding contempt. Because they think they know all about him, the people with whom Jesus grew up cannot accept him as a prophet. Jesus laments, "No prophet is without honor except in his native place." And as the result of all this, Jesus is unable to perform the kind of powerful signs in his hometown that he does elsewhere.

If Jesus has a home today, we are it. Your church, and churches like it all over the world, is full of people who have grown up with Jesus, and who assume that they know all about him. Couldn't it be that our familiarity with Jesus has bred a species of contempt? Most of us have known Jesus almost as long as we have known our parents. We slept or squirmed through sermons before we could walk. Jesus was that nice man in our picture books, the plastic statue on our grandmother's bureau or our uncle's dashboard.

Can that Jesus -- the Jesus of our grade school nativity play --

really be who he claims to be? Can he bring solace and meaning and hope to our troubled, very grown-up lives? Can he really be the Son of the living God? Can Good News of that magnitude really be available to anyone who cares to listen?

If we had to travel to a remote land, and cross a desolate wilderness, and climb a craggy peak to a crumbling temple, to hear about Jesus Christ, then perhaps the Gospel would strike us with full force. We might feel its real power to transform our lives. As it is, our good fortune of growing up close to Jesus can have an unfortunate side effect. We, like his Galilean neighbors, can take him for granted.

I think there are occasions when Christ's capacity to transform our lives is limited not by his power, not by his love for us, and not by his saving plan for each one of us. Rather, Christ is limited by our imagination, and our conception of what it is possible for him to do.

Each of us needs to free Jesus of the limitations we have placed on him. Otherwise, our lack of faith can prevent him from performing powerful signs in our lives. We can't see the signs if we assume they couldn't possibly be there. If we can perceive Jesus anew, if we can see him as he really is, then when we hear the Gospel, to paraphrase God's words to Ezekiel, "We shall know that a prophet has been among us."