

In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy famously said, “There’s no place like home,” but remember she was expressing love and longing for a home she initially had been desperate to escape. For many people, our feelings about our hometowns and our relationships with our families are complex. The suburb I grew up in was a desirable place to live by the most common reckonings, but in my miserable high school years, I couldn’t wait to leave and go live in a city. It was where I was from, but was it truly “home”? I never regretted leaving, but I loved coming back to visit. Good friends outweigh bad memories.

But after my parents moved away, and more and more friends left, too, my own sense of connection to the place became weaker, and my visits, less frequent. That was OK too, because I’ve come to understand the concept of “home” very differently than I used to, far more than an accidental intersection of geography and birth. So while I wouldn’t presume to know how Jesus felt about visiting his hometown, today’s Gospel certainly strikes a chord.

Up to this point in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has been on a roll, an unstoppable force of super-nature doing great deeds of power and attracting large crowds of ardent supporters. But then, in one brief encounter Jesus suddenly becomes more relatable, we see his humanity come to the foreground as his divinity moves to the background, and the stage is set for his ministry to come into focus.

This crowd is hostile, and by calling Jesus “son of Mary,” instead of the customary “son of Joseph,” they are suggesting he comes from a scandalous background. They scoff at the stories of his deeds of power; the way they bring up his former life as a tradesman is a way of saying, “We know what those hands can do, and it’s nothing miraculous.” We can easily miss the insults, but to the original audience, it was blatant.

But Jesus has bigger and better things to do than trade trash talk. At this point, his goal is more for people to repent and return to God than it is for them to understand precisely who he is. He points out that his negative experience there is the sort of thing that happens to legitimate prophets and he even cures a few sick people before he leaves town. I love it that Mark portrays Jesus as so powerful that a cluster of miraculous healings is kind of an off day.

That’s not because Jesus can’t or won’t heal people who don’t believe in him; he can and he does. But we’ve already seen in Mark’s Gospel that people who misunderstood Jesus’s miracles thought they were signs of demonic activity, which only set back Jesus’s mission, when he was trying to ramp it up. So doing more in his hometown, ironically would have undermined his purpose. He didn’t want to create more misunderstandings, and either be delayed by trying to clear them up, or not clear them up and let them grow.

It’s important for us to remember that, as people who have faith in the abiding work of the Holy Spirit, it can be OK to “shake off the dust that is on your feet” and move

on from a place that rejects you. So instead of getting bogged down in provincial nonsense, Jesus commissions his disciples to follow him... by *not* following him around for a while, and go out, “among the villages” of the countryside, proclaiming the Good News that God desires a new intimacy with humanity, and is doing wonderful things to make that happen. They weren’t in Kansas anymore.

As an introvert, if I had been there, I would have been horrified. “Go and *talk* to people we *don’t know*? Can’t we just skip to the part where they stone us?” But Jesus wasn’t just trying to cover more ground; he wanted the disciples to begin to take a sense of investment in his mission; to begin to take on responsibility, and agency; and to gain the kind of deep understanding you can only get by living the message they had so far been merely learning. As an introvert who has accepted Jesus’s call to go out and proclaim the Good News, I know that it’s a wonderful experience, tremendously encouraging and empowering, a growth experience that prepared them to grow even more.

This missionary journey only gets a few verses, but it prefigures not only the apostolic ministry that the disciples would begin after the day of Pentecost, but also the life of ministry to which every Christian is called, the Church’s pattern of proclamation and service in every age. As our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said, “God came among us in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth to show us the way to be reconciled with the God who deeply and passionately loves each and every one of us, to be reconciled and right with that God and to be reconciled and right with each other as the children of that one God who created us all... He came to show us... how to be more than a collection of individualized self-interests... He came to show us how to *become* the *human family* of God. And in that, my friends, is our hope and our salvation, now and unto the day of eternity.”

As we grow in knowledge, experience, and understanding, our call grows with us. We have to grow, for while God is always with us, God is more readily manifest outside our comfort zone and when we are less powerful; our own comfort and self-regard can easily blind us to what God is doing, or opportunities God might give us to advance God’s work on Earth. And so Jesus keeps pushing us out of familiar territory and into new mission fields, new vocations, new opportunities to bring the life and hope and joy of God in Christ to a world that needs them, badly.

I read an article by a priest named Nurya Parish who also had some issues with her upbringing. She was not raised in a religious family. As a child, the only talk she ever heard about God was from fundamentalists who told her if she didn’t do and think what they told her, she would go to hell. To her credit, she didn’t believe them, but that didn’t automatically make her believe God loved her. We all have to be told that by someone. She wrote, pointedly, “Where was The Episcopal Church when I was a child? Why did I never hear of a God who had come to save the world because of God’s great love for all creation? Why did no one ever hand me a book of prayer and invite me to

consider the catechism? Why did nobody ever invite me to become a disciple — not because otherwise I would burn for eternity! — but because knowing and serving Jesus is the path to abundant life? Because there are even more kids today than there were in 1978 who have never actually heard the gospel.”

We may tell ourselves that other people don't want to hear the Good News of God's unconditional love, but that's not true. People *love* to hear good news; the bigger, the better. We may tell ourselves that religion is strictly a private matter, or that evangelism is something that “other people” are called to do, but that's not true either. Jesus calls his followers to proclaim the Good News about him. All of his followers, not just the clergy. We may not be able to do anything supernatural. Some of us may not have much in the way of medical skills. But proclaiming the truth about God's love and grace can be a powerful work of healing. Atrocious lies about God are in abundant circulation, and those lies are hurting people, and separating them from God. Let it not be said that we chose not to help them, by staying silent, or refusing to expand our circles.

We may feel unready, or uncomfortable. But the power of Christ dwells in us. God's grace is sufficient for us. You can be an apostle without walking very far, and you are already well-equipped with knowledge, community, and purity of heart. There truly is no place like home, but this isn't *The Wizard of Oz*. Our story is much bigger. Our journey is not an attempt to go back to our flawed, but familiar origins. While we are meant to make the world a better place, the world is just where we're from, not our home, in the sense that we are not meant to conform to its norms and values. We are on our way to a home we've never lived in, a home we've only glimpsed, that's filled with people we haven't met, yet. Because our home is the Kingdom of God, where God wants all people to live, joyfully and at peace. And by sharing that good news, we can help our neighbors to abide there.