

This is Jesus' first sermon-in his old hometown and it doesn't appear to go well. By the end of the service, the congregation is trying to throw him off a cliff, which is a couple of steps above complaining to the warden I would think. And this isn't any old congregation that Jesus happened to wonder into. This is a congregation that has known Jesus since he was a kid. You know, a toddler running up and down the first century equivalent of church aisles. People who are basically Uncles and Aunts to the kids who grow up in the congregation, who teach the kids in Sabbath School, who organize the youth retreats, who hand off little candy bars when they think no one is looking, these are the people who now have suddenly laid their hands on one of their own with murder in their eyes and hearts.

Even in the worst of church fights, no one throws the rector off the cliffs - although some might occasionally consider the possibility.

What did Jesus say to cause such an intense reaction?

1. Luke tells us that Jesus came to the Nazareth synagog as was his usual practice when he was growing up. He's been preaching a bit here and there and is picking up a reputation for being filled with the Holy Spirit.

2. Someone handed Jesus a scroll to read from - Isaiah as it turns out. And Jesus reads not just any old passage out of Isaiah, He reads one of the deepest hope filled passages of faith: that God's year of favor will arrive. That the blind will see, the captives will be freed and the hungry will be fed. Jesus reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

3. Then Jesus sets aside the text and tells to the congregation, "Surprise! Its me. I'm the one promised in this text. Here I am."

And oddly, no one seems to react poorly. At least not yet. "Ah, isn't this Joseph's son? What a nice preacher he's become," they murmur among themselves.

But Jesus wasn't done yet.

He knows he isn't Joseph's son any longer. Jesus knows he's now someone new, someone the world has never seen before. Jesus now knows that the world is about to be changed in the next three years because he is now clearly God at work in the world.

But in order for that work to happen, people have to be ready to see who Jesus actually is now. It can't take place among people who are too busy looking for Jesus son of Joseph instead of Jesus, son of God. Who can blame them? They know Jesus, son of Joseph. Jesus, son of God may be beyond their imagination.

Auntie Ruth isn't going to let go of her image of a kid who - I donna - either stole an extra treat from the table or maybe just made sure that Uncle Simon's cane was always close at hand. They

know the old Jesus, the pre-baptism Jesus too well to be able to see who is standing in front of them, freshly transformed by the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus proceeds to give the congregation very startling news: "I can't do miracles here among you."

Which seems to be the trigger for the synagog riot.

And this is the point in the story when many times we pause and ask, was it fair of Jesus' home congregation to expect him to do a few God tricks? Like King Herod's Song in the musical Jesus Christ, Superstar where Herod sings, "So if you are the Christ, Yes the great Jesus Christ, prove to me that you're no fool, walk across my swimming pool..."

But I don't know that Jesus ever made a spiritual gesture just to show off.

It seems to me that the moment we expect God to show up at our command, God is going to remind us who is actually in charge of the world. God shows up when we need God. God shows up when it pleases God. God shows up because God is crazy in love with us but God never shows up because we're the boss of God.

It is not that God becomes angry and pushes back like some authority challenge on the playground. Its just that if we think we can command God, then we're not going to see God. If we think we can control God with good behavior or high donations or hours of prayer, then we are looking for the wrong God because our God doesn't take bribes. God loves all of us already. God is already at work on helping us find what and who we need. We can trust God to love us even when we forget who we are looking for.

But the congregation doesn't want to hear about what a prophet can and can't do in their home town. I think the congregation wants their local boy to make the congregation look good. They aren't so much interested in the well being of the widows around them so much as if Jesus can help them look like the next up and coming spiritual place to be.

I can't help but wonder if the elders are saying to each other, "Look, its Joseph's boy. And he's going to grow this congregation like nobody's business. A few miracles, a few bang up sermons and we'll be fixing the roof in no time. Maybe build a new wing."

But Jesus knows that isn't how God works.

And he tells them that isn't how God works.

And the riot begins.

And then Jesus just passes through and goes on his way.

I've always wondered how that happened. It's tempting to think that Jesus did perform a miracle by masking himself with some sort of Harry Potter Godly invisibility cloak or maybe a simple Jedi trick, "This is not the Jesus you are looking for," but I don't think Jesus did that. I don't think Jesus plays tricks. Not at the command of others and not for his own self gain. I think Jesus deals straight with people because that is how God deals with all of us. Look at this morning's passage from Corinthians. We usually only hear this at weddings, but this passage is larger than a romantic seal between two people. This passage comes from a letter that Paul is writing to a church in deep conflict and Paul is writing about the essential nature of God, the source of Love. Paul writes,

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Love does not play tricks to manipulate the other and Jesus plays no tricks to slip out of the crowd.

Instead, I think, the crowd simply stopped being able to see Jesus. The crowd was so caught up in their old-style of thinking that they couldn't imagine God at work in new ways. The crowd was so caught up in their old, highly limited view of Jesus that they couldn't see the God claimed, freshly baptized, holy spirit infused and transformed Jesus. They were so intent on killing the old Jesus that they completely missed Everlasting Life walking among them. Jesus didn't disappear. The congregation just refused to see him.

And that's the second question for us today.

Where are we refusing to see God at work today?

Where are we clinging so hard to the past, to the old ways that we can't see God's new work today?

I think it's difficult to be a Christian, to be a follower of Christ and a child of God because quite frankly, we don't ever get to say "Hey, got it, I can rest easy now." I think Jesus is always going to keep showing up in places we don't expect. I think Jesus will always be asking us to keep our eyes open, to keep our vision fresh. If we aren't finding what we think we are looking for, then this story suggests that maybe we're looking for the wrong thing, or the wrong person, or the wrong Jesus.

Maybe we should stand still, for just a little bit, and try to open our eyes wide and just see what exists to be seen. Maybe instead of asking "What Would Jesus Do," we need to ask, "Where Is Jesus Now?"

The answer will always be: Right here in the middle of the crowd. God is with us. Let us dare to see him.