

## ***“Without Honor”***

*Matthew 13:53-14:12*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX  
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 3, 2013

A young man arrived back home after his first year of college. He carried his things up to his room and began to put them away. After a few minutes he came out and said to his mother, “I guess what they say is true. You really can’t go home again.” His mother held back the tears long enough to ask him what he meant. He said, “you can’t go home again. Your stuff never fits back in the closet.”

I was blessed to have a great home growing up. We lived in a huge, suburban subdivision with about 5000 homes! All of my friends lived within bicycle distance and it was safe to get there. We knew our neighbors and they weren’t afraid to call my parents. But there’s no going back. Shortly after Leslie and I were married my parents grew up and moved away, selling the house where they had lived for twenty years. Even though they have a lovely house now, it’s not home.

But even if they hadn’t moved there would be no going back. You simply can’t recapture the same experiences. You’re a different person now than you were when you left home. Now not everyone has that kind of experience growing up. Still, there’s something about the idea of home that just resonates with most of us. We’re either trying to get back to the home we once had or we’re trying to get to the one we wished we had. Ever since Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, we have been trying to find our way back home.

As we heard in today’s reading, Jesus returned to his hometown to visit. This passage is a key turning point in Matthew’s gospel. First of all, it is a transition from one of the sections of Jesus’ teaching, in this case the parables of the Kingdom, to a section of narrative about things Jesus did. But we also find Matthew focusing more on Jesus teaching his disciples instead of the crowds.

We’re not told why he went home to visit. Perhaps because of the difficult encounter he had with his family in chapter 12. Or perhaps it was just the right thing to do. What we do know, however, is that while there he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath. It was customary for visiting rabbis to be asked to read the Scriptures and to teach and we’re told that Jesus did just that. Luke tells us that Jesus read one of the messianic prophecies from Isaiah and then proceeded to tell the people that the prophecy was fulfilled in their hearing.

It’s not clear whether this was the same instance or another, but Matthew does tell us that the people listening were “astonished.” This is not necessarily a positive thing and in fact it’s clear that they were not happy. You see, they remember Jesus growing up there in Nazareth. They knew his family. They knew that he was not trained as a rabbi. That’s why they said, “Where did this man get all this wisdom and these mighty works?” In other words, they were saying, “this man’s in construction. He’s no rabbi and certainly not the Messiah!”

The next section of this passage is actually a flashback. Matthew tells us that Herod the tetrarch heard about Jesus, which made him think about John the Baptist. The Herods were a family of rulers around the time of Jesus who were half Jewish but they were all wicked. The Herod referred to here is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who tried to murder Jesus when he was a baby. When he died he divided his kingdom among his sons, which is why Antipas is called Herod the tetrarch. A tetrarch was more like a governor or prince of a smaller region, but Antipas liked to call himself king.

Antipas was married to the daughter of a neighboring king but decided to divorce her in order to seduce and marry his half-

brother's wife, Herodius. This was clearly a violation of Jewish law and John the Baptist was very vocal about it. Remember that John the Baptist was rightly considered by many people to be a prophet, the first prophet in 400 years. He is really the last of the Old Testament prophets. While one of the roles of the prophet was to announce what God would do some time in the future, one of the primary jobs of the prophet was to serve as the conscience for the king. When King David had an affair with Bathsheba, God sent the prophet Nathan to show David that it was wrong. So John the Baptist regularly let Herod know that his marriage was wrong. That landed John in prison and eventually cost him his life.

But that's not why Matthew put this story here. This is primarily about Jesus and it's here because it tells us something about Jesus. You see, both these stories are about rejection. Herod rejected John's message but he also rejected Jesus. When he heard about the way Jesus healed the sick, lame, and blind, he wouldn't accept that this was God in person. Instead, he had a misguided sense of reincarnation and fate. He was afraid that John had come back to life. In Nazareth the people who knew Jesus rejected him and even his own family rejected him at this point.

Today we find more and more people rejecting Jesus and his message. It seems to me that in these verses we find basically three ways that people reject Christ. The first way is through outright hostility. This is the viewpoint of the atheist who has heard at least something about Jesus and his claim to be God and has decided to reject the idea. The hostile person will then actively persecute those who do believe. The persecution may be physical harm or it may be simply name-calling. The hostile person becomes very angry at the idea of God.

The second way people reject the Messiah is by indifference. Maybe you've heard about Jesus but never really bothered

to find out for yourself whether there's any truth to the story. You think, "I have a pretty good life, what do I need religion for?" Or maybe you've grown up in the church and don't feel like you reject Jesus, but you simply don't make worshiping him a priority. You say that "some day" you'll get more involved or learn more about Jesus. But as the lyrics to a song that was popular 25 years ago say, "even if you choose not to decide you still have made a choice." If you're not choosing to make the Lord Jesus the highest priority in your life you're in some ways rejecting him.

The third way we reject Jesus is probably the one you and I are most in danger of and that's through familiarity. This was the people of Nazareth. They thought they knew Jesus. They said, "we know his mother and his brothers and sisters. He's no rabbi and certainly not the Messiah. Surely we would have known that. He's the carpenter's son. He's speaking blasphemy going around saying he's God."

Many of us have been around Christianity for years, maybe even our whole life. We think we know what Jesus is about and what we're supposed to do. We have tamed Jesus to make him benign. Some people like to say that Jesus was a good man, a great teacher, perhaps a great moral guide who came to show us how to follow God. When we think like that we end up seeing him like Mister Rogers or Gandhi. We make him safe.

But Jesus is not like that at all. We miss the fact that the God who created this entire universe out of nothing came here as one of us. According to Colossians 1, Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that

in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Jesus is the only person to ever conquer death and he's the only one able to save us.

So then it's a dangerous thing to reject Christ. Not only does it have eternal consequences, but it has consequences right here right now. Verse 13:58 says that Jesus did not do many mighty works in Nazareth "because of their unbelief." They missed out on the blessings from God that could have been theirs. There are things God wants to do in your life today that you will miss if you reject him.

But let me end with some good news. You *can* change. Even if you have rejected the real Jesus until today there's still time for you to repent and welcome him into your life.

Rejection does not have to be permanent like it was for Herod, who died broken and penniless in France. You see, we learn from the New Testament that after his resurrection, Jesus' brothers not only accepted the truth about him, they became prominent followers. His brother James became one of the key leaders of the church in Jerusalem and God used both James and Jude to write epistles that are in the New Testament. The only explanation for their complete change in attitude is their encounter with the risen Christ.

And it's the same for you and me. When you encounter the risen Christ personally and are willing to accept him for who he is – that is the true God in person – then he will use you to do amazing things for his kingdom. May it be so.

*Amen*