

Hometown Hero?

Good morning, Church...Wow, just wow...it's always fun to see how much more elaborate Mark gets on his introductions each time he does them. I did command a nuclear-powered attack submarine and a naval submarine base, and I did things at US Strategic Command that I was woefully under qualified for; but then came another challenge. Eleven years ago, Tammy and I walked into Christ Community Church, struggling in our marriage and with life in general; we were welcomed with open arms. We sat over there and since church people seem to have seating assignments, we were there at Easter eleven years ago and gave our lives to Jesus. I think we were spiritually and relationally at a place that many people here have experienced, and others are in the middle of. Church was a foreign place; we were trying to figure out what our next steps were in healing our relationship and understanding our new faith; in the struggle we found the best next step is to just show up. So many people come to faith in Jesus and then just tread water, but the only thing that happens if you do that is that you drift toward danger and eventually become tired and drown. So, we dog paddled our way into baptism, the equivalent of the 101 discipleship classes, serving on various teams, group life, some education and time figuring out how to read the Bible...it started slow, but gained speed and eventually after many next steps we were recruited by Jesus into ministry. What God has in store for you will become more clear as you learn to surrender your will to what Jesus wants for your life...today wasn't in view when Tammy and I started to dog paddle our way out of the mess we were in eleven years ago.

Join me in **Prayer**

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I left small town Minnesota in 1975 for the Naval Academy in Annapolis Maryland never having seen the ocean. I knew that life was going to be tough, but this was not what I expected. The harassment started before taking the oath of office and was designed to scare the civilian out of us. For all first-year students, called plebes, common misery was the catalyst for change. And after 5 months, they sent us home on Christmas break. Up to that point I had little interaction with family back home; these were the old days of no computers, internet, email or cell phones – only letters and payphones shared by hundreds. Of course, it was amazing to see family again, but they talked differently than I remembered, and my friends seemed less friendly, and my language was a bit saucier than it was 5 months earlier, or maybe it was the smoking and drinking. Home seemed different and after other homecomings over the course of years, Mom affectionally began calling me her heathen son...she was right, I had changed; I was not the Jim she expected. **Can anyone here relate to coming home after an extended absence and not feeling like they fit in?** In the absence of a shared set of experiences; time and distance have a way of changing a person; in this case from a church going son into a heathen son that Mom would remind me of for the next 35 years.

It is with the same clash of expectations we find ourselves viewing Jesus as the hometown hero returning to Nazareth; not as the young son, brother, craftsman and friend who left about a year earlier, but now a man with a reputation that seemed too good to be true. Our text today is from the Gospel of Luke Chapter 4 verses 14 through 30. Follow along in your Bibles, on your phones or on the screen as we begin reading at verse 14.

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¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

Jesus has been away from Nazareth for almost a year...he has been baptized by John, tempted by Satan, attracted his first followers, turned water into wine 6 miles away in Cana, cleansed the temple during Passover and spent 8-9 months gaining disciples.

Has anyone felt a little confused that the timeline in the Book of Luke doesn't seem to match with the gospels written by Matthew and Mark? Yea, me too!

That's because Luke builds his narrative around the geographic movement of Jesus' ministry rather than around a timeline of events. Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his ministry at the same place on the Jordan River where the nation of Israel crossed into the Promised Land. Just as God proceeded Israel, the Spirit of God fills Jesus and leads him into the Judean wilderness where he is sustained by the Spirit and tested by Satan and then geographically on to Nazareth where Jesus comes home in the power of the Spirit, not as the son of Joseph but as the Son of God to begin his public ministry.

Continuing in verse 16...

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the

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scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

You can imagine the place is silent waiting for his next words.

These verses are unique to Luke and not found in the parallel stories in Matthew and Mark; the eyewitness account probably came from Mary the mother of Jesus who was likely present in the synagogue. Jesus showed up to challenge people’s expectations of him by using a literary technique called a Chiasm. (Slide 1) You know how much Mark loves to use maps; well, a chiasm is a literary map that uses words instead of pictures to lead the reader to a main point.

(Read and explain the structure)

Luke uses language like an arrow on a map to point us to the main theme of his entire gospel; the Spirit of the Lord is on Jesus, and because the Spirit is, Jesus is more than anyone expected, not only a prophet, but the real deal - the anointed one, the Messiah that God has promised; the better Moses, the better priest, the

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suffering servant foretold by Isaiah, the salvation that God promised his people; Jesus is not Mary and Joseph's son come home to entertain; he is the Son of God and this is not what the people who thought they knew him expected when they came to church that morning.

Take Slide 1 down.

In the words of the great prophet Scooby-Do, "Ruh-Roh" ...the Law and the Prophets fulfilled in our hearing? They heard it...I'm the Messiah...they had been waiting for so long, but they didn't see it coming from the kid next door.

Isa 61:1-2 proclaims comfort for God's oppressed-broken and shattered people. Jesus uses it in a similar fashion here, proclaiming himself to be God's Servant, the Messiah arriving to deliver his suffering and oppressed people. Jesus identifies himself as the bearer of good news to the poor and evokes imagery reminiscent of the Year of Jubilee-an observance occurring every 50 years in which all debt was forgiven, and all property restored to the original owners - this is the messianic declaration that will be fulfilled at Calvary except it isn't financial and physical debt that Jesus came to deal with...he came to deal with spiritual debt. In these words, Jesus connects his ministry to the salvation promised by God; good news for all those people on the underside of power...the poor-the prisoners-the blind-the oppressed and spiritually broken will be returned their rightful owner, God.

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Jesus didn't read the full text of verse 61:2, he skips "and the day of vengeance"; this would have seemed like stopping in mid-sentence to the hearer, but that was his intent. The point...today is the day of salvation and not vengeance. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, not to condemn but to save people from sin. The day of vengeance is in the future when he returns as our King.

Verse 22.

²² All spoke well of him and were amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

Respectful commentary was expected during the sermon so imagine the murmurs spreading around the synagogue. Some friends talking about him, but not fully committed to him; impressed with the message but confused by the messenger. Here are some additional descriptions of the moment from Matthew and Mark, "Where did this man get these things? "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? This isn't what they expected and sentiment in the room probably ranged from overwhelming joy to outrage along an exponential curve of emotion that hung on the next words from Jesus

²³ Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

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Contextually-the proverb translates, heal your kin; you did it elsewhere, so what about us? We've got to see it to believe it.

The people demanded signs and wonders BEFORE they would accept Jesus as anything other than a carpenter's son. Essentially, we won't believe a word you say until you take care of what ails you and it sounds like you have a Messiah complex. Before you can help us, you need to take care of your own problems...practice your medicine at home...Mark would add that Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.

²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

The offense...taking power to the gentiles, not to your hometown. He knew their thoughts; gentiles receive God's aid while his chosen people continue to suffer. His "friends" saw a hometown poser not a hometown hero...they didn't see Jesus as the Warrior King they expected to come and save his people, so they dismissed the reported signs and wonders attributed to Jesus and wrote him off as a

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blasphemer. The message they wanted didn't match the messenger God sent...they wanted a warrior king and got a suffering servant, and they were not happy. The Jews rejected Elijah and God sent him to the Gentiles...they rejected Elisha and God sent him to the Israel's enemy. In the same way, Jesus is rejected and he too will be sent elsewhere; eventually to us.

Maybe loving your neighbor as yourself is harder for the neighbor you know than the one you don't; you don't have to get over the past. The Messiah they were looking for wasn't Jesus. They wanted Works of God but got the Word of God...they wanted a Warrior but got what looked like a Wimp...they saw the kid next door and missed the King of Kings and Lord of Lords that they had prayed would save them from physical oppression but didn't see that spiritual oppression and sin was and still are the real illnesses affecting mankind. Jesus' first incarnation produced a Messiah who came to seek and save the lost; they expected a messiah that brought God's vengeance on their oppressors. They wanted their version of Christ so badly that they couldn't see Jesus for who he was.

Expectation is a paradox (Slide 2)

- Negative view: Expectation is the mother of all frustration (Antonio Banderas)
- Positive view: Expectations are the key to everything (Sam Walton)

You can't live with them, but you can't live without them. Expectations are like air; they exist in and around us and are a part of daily life. They come in the form

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of cultural norms, billboards and thirty second advertisements for the latest self-help product, social media highlight reels, resolutions and goals and five-year plans. We manage them and are told to expect the unexpected. Expectations are the key to everything and the great frustration.

The first time I applied for my current job, I was turned down as not being spiritually mature. Although I was only one year into my faith, I expected to get the job and was confused when I didn't. Spiritual maturity...like, did I need more time in my faith or another class or to read my Bible more? Mark met with me for a consolation breakfast to let me down gently and I asked him how I could get spiritually mature. He said, "just keep on doing what you have been doing". Emotionally, I went from confused to angry in about an instant, because I had no idea what I was doing, and all I wanted was the 10-step checklist to spiritual maturity. Mark swears that he would never give such poor advice, but I think the Holy Spirit was using him as a sock puppet that morning because that is just what I needed to hear. I told myself, "Fine I'll figure this out for myself". In confession, I'm pretty sure I kicked my tire too. So, I drove to Bellevue University and dropped from a Masters program in Criminal Justice and then over to Grace University to enroll in a Masters program in Christian Ministry. I didn't see it at the time, but I needed rejection to redirect; God couldn't use me for his future purposes until I made this change and I wasn't going there on my own. Somewhere along the way I figured out what Paul meant in Romans 12 when he told us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. In the military, surrender was a word to be avoided, but in Christ, I found that surrender to God and the work of

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the Holy Spirit is the only path to victory. I graduated from Grace 3 ½ years later and started working at Christ Community the next day.

At the same time, Tammy and I were estranged from our son and had been for almost a decade. This was not the relationship we expected and not being able to fix the situation ate into each of us and into our marriage. At a Friday morning breakfast, I lamented to my best friend Tim Anstead that I prayed for a prodigal son moment where I saw James running towards us. Tim reminded me that I had missed the whole point of the parable. The unexpected response was not the son returning to the Father, but the Father running toward his son in the same way that God pursues each of us into the messiness of our lives with an offer of a second chance. Tim gave me some great advice that I can't repeat, but it involved extracting my head from somewhere and calling my son. I did, and several weeks later Tammy and I met James at JFK; **surrender became victory.** God restored the relationship with our son. He is the most amazing dad to our grandson Gabriel and our daughter Rebecca is an accomplished farrier; we love them and are so grateful for our shared life.

Unmet expectations are speedbumps to relationships...marriages, family, friends and where you work, but (Slide 3)

Jesus didn't come to meet our expectations; He came to meet his **(read it again and pause)**

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The purpose of Jesus' ministry was to defeat his real enemies, sin and Satan. He did that in an unexpected way that opened a door to the Kingdom of God by surrendering his life to gain victory, in the same way that he calls each of us to surrender our lives to him. It takes a certain kind of savior to stop the runaway expectation train; Jesus' hometown friends expected a warrior and saw a wannabe rabbi, so they rejected him. They were so used to having their expectations crushed that Jesus was the unexpected answer they missed. The expectation train keeps rolling today and our job as disciples of Jesus is to help people get off that train at a stop where they can experience the savior-Jesus who is the only expectation that we can depend on.

At Easter service in 2012 Tammy and I gave our lives to Jesus. After 35 years of hearing Mom refer to me as her heathen son, I was super excited about calling and telling her that I had been saved that morning and to hear her excited response. Mom was a bit hard of hearing and didn't like talking on the phone. When I told her my news, I was disappointed that she didn't sound as excited as I expected her to be... "that's nice son, but I have to go". When I hung up the phone, the connection stayed active for several seconds. It was enough time to hear her exclaim, "thank you Jesus-thank you Jesus-thank you Jesus, you saved my son...I have been praying for him for so long"...and the line went dead.

Jesus met my expectation in an unexpected way through the prayers of a faithful mother; God's expectation for you is to surrender yourself to him, because surrender is victory when surrendering to Jesus and I want that for each of you.

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Jesus stands at the door of your heart and knocks; invite him in and be amazed at the plans he has for you.

Church, you have been precious family to Tammy and me; we couldn't have predicted this when we washed up at your front door 11 years ago. The last chorus of Remembrance that you heard after Communion reminds me of the confident expectation of eternal life we have because of Jesus...until I see you face to face, until at last I've won my race, remind me you're not finished yet...we are so excited for the ministry that God has in store for us as we begin our travels. Thank you for taking us in, being a part our healing and spiritual growth and the privilege of trusting us to minister to you in Christ.

Join me in prayer

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, our savior, sanctifier, healer and coming king! Amen