

2 Sam 5:1-5, 9-10

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, ‘Look, we are your bone and flesh. For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel.’ So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah for seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years. David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inwards. And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

Mark 6:1-6

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

“Going Home, With Jesus”

This has been my first Geneseo Summer Festival weekend! I moved here and began to serve in ministry with Central Presbyterian Church in August of last year. I must confess that this weekend has been a blast. I’ve found it a blessing to be a part of a community that makes time to play, relax and celebrate our life together. From meeting many of your friends and family this weekend I’ve learned that this festival draws back tons of people who used to call Geneseo home. Family reunions, class reunions, old friends gathering together—many people have come to visit the place they called home for some part of their lives.

The word or notion of “home” brings different images, places, people and memories to each of our minds. Home has been claimed in various places: on the range, as a home away from home, the homes we grew up in, the home of our making as adults, in a dorm room at college, or even in a lifetime partner or with a group of friends—they can become a kind of home. No matter how the word home plays out in your personal experience, “home” usually rekindles our sense of belonging and identity.

David thought so much of his new “stronghold” and kingly home, that after conquering it and being made king over all of Israel he named Jerusalem the “city of David.” It was a marvelous home, if you are the king, maybe not so much if you are Bathsheba or Uriah. Yet David was chosen by God, anointed by Samuel, and then called by the people Israel to rule over them. The people saw that God was at work in David even though he often made poor choices. He was a shepherd boy, the youngest in his family, transformed into a powerful king through God’s grace. This image, the servant of God becoming a powerful military and ruling king, fit with ancient Israel’s image of how God worked in the world.

Whenever David returned to his home and namesake city, the people rejoiced!

Jesus does not receive the same welcome in his hometown. Even though God is obviously working through him—his hometown did not rejoice at God’s work in Jesus.

His treks home were not the stuff of Hallmark moments nor were there great parades to meet the local boy who could heal the sick and interpret the scriptures with authority. Whenever Jesus went home tensions arose. He always shook things up to an unacceptable level. Last time Jesus went home his family came and tried to “restrain” him because his teachings claimed so much attention that the authorities from Jerusalem came to accuse him of being filled with demonic powers. His family thought he had gone crazy. Who says things like, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” when they are standing right outside, and then looks around at people gathered around him who are unrelated and claims “Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Hometown opinions about Jesus hadn’t changed since his last visit. They all know he’s Mary’s boy, trained as a carpenter, not an interpreter of the scriptures. His brothers and sisters live right next door to the locals like normal Jews. Who does Jesus think he is?

These folks watched Jesus grow up and they knew the truth; he had an unremarkable background just like theirs! Yet whatever he said was so powerful, so filled with wisdom that the people gathered were scandalized.

When he was Dean of the Duke Chapel, Will Willamon used to teach an intro to the Gospels class. He would ask his students or Freshpersons, why they thought Jesus so often spoke in parables? One said it was so simple people could understand his message. Another returned that he must have been a lousy teacher because they usually missed the message. The class ended up determining that “something about Jesus, something in his teaching or in his person, turned away more people than he attracted. . . . Jesus...was willing to suffer rejection, was quite content to be misunderstood...because the point he was making was not dependent, for its validity, on their acceptance.” His radical message was God’s love incarnate—a whole world redefining order for us to grasp. Following Jesus is much more complicated than placing trust in a military ruler like King David.

God chose to rule in and through Jesus offering a new covenant to humanity—yet we have trouble accepting the radical way Jesus rules. You know it took his family a long time to recognize God at work in him. In Acts and other Gospels we hear that they eventually came around. Over time they discerned God’s presence at work in Jesus and came to accept that their son and brother was God’s chosen one, the messiah. Their former vision of a messiah was inadequate.

Jesus’ disciples begin to understand that following this messiah would not be easy as they witness his rejection in Nazareth. The next thing Jesus did was to send the disciples out to minister in pairs—with the expectation of being rejected. And they went! Going home with Jesus apparently does strange things to his followers. They claim a new identity and are willing to risk rejection for the sake of following God’s will.

Each week we pray the words “thy kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer. We say these words over and over—but do we actually accept the rule-breaking reign of God into our lives to reorder the world? We are often in disagreement with the way Jesus intends to “rule” this world and even our own lives. Does he provide enough safety and security? We recognize military might, intellectual reasoning, and other feats of great strength, but God’s power shown forth in amazing grace, God’s claim to peace or shalom, God’s

abiding love, and God's great compassion for all humanity—seem too good to be true. Are God's promises of peace coming through Jesus' rule just a fairytale?

King David, for all his faults, knew something about of going home with God too. Although he claimed the city he named for himself as his earthly home, the scriptures, especially the Psalms, make it clear that David always knew his real home was God's everlasting love and mercy, God's covenant with him and Israel.

How does one find our home in God instead of in this world?

Jesus often retreated to the woods to claim and find his home in God in solitude. He also took breaks from the crowds to help his disciples claim their home in God. Going home with Jesus means claiming that our true home is found as we rest in God's eternal care. No matter what we are facing in our lives, be it good, bad or ugly, God is with us—our shelter through it all. We live in the world recognizing that this is not our resting place; God's love is.

Jesus' life is focused on returning home. Nazareth is merely a stop on his way to fully claiming his home with God. Because he rests in God's love and care, Jesus can bear the knowledge that those who knew him best in this world were least able to see God's power at work in him. By resting in the comfort and identity of his eternal home, the loving communion of our triune God, Jesus showed us that strength is manifest in weakness that love trumps all evil, and that rejection by family and society and even death have no power over God's rule. Amen.