

Have you been to your 10th, 20th, 50th high school reunion?
Aren't high school reunions great!
Or, maybe they aren't so great.
Personally, I have managed to miss
both my 10th and my 20th.

My tenth I was in seminary and my twentieth
came during a very busy time in my life.
But people at high school reunions especially
early on usually gather around and do the old,
"Do you remember so and so ?
Do you remember the scandal it caused
when (you fill in the blanks)."
It is the game of "Do you remember."

For some of us it is a time of laughter and
reminiscing but for others let's just say that
some of our high school years are better left forgotten.
Then, you get those people who stand there
looking at you and say, "Oh my how you have changed."

What they are really saying is,
"Boy, you have put on weight.
Or, I remember you as having more hair,
or blonde hair, not white hair.
And by the way, were your glasses trifocals in high school?
But then they remember they
didn't have trifocals back then.

And there are always those people
who want your life's update.
They're not really interested in what you are doing ,
they just want to see if you have turned out
the way they assumed you would turn out.

That's when the fun comes in for me
when I meet old friends. "So, Jeremy, what are you doing these days?"
The look on their face is so precious when I say,
"Well, after high school I finally decided to go to college
where I spent seven years trying to make it out
and then God called me to the ministry
and I decided to go to school for another 3 years
to get my masters of divinity and enter the ministry.

Just about then, it is time to call 911 and
start resuscitating the individual.

They also begin hiding their drink or apologizing for the profanity they have displayed before me. Often reunions with those who knew me are not my favorite thing.

This morning we hear of a reunion that Jesus went to. It was a hometown reunion where he caused just about as much shock as I do at my reunions. Jesus and his disciples had been on a road trip around the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus had been carrying out his threefold ministry of teaching, preaching and healing. And decided to go home. But why go back home? It had been about a year since he left.

Some months earlier, before his reputation spread, his home town acquaintances tried to explain away his claim of being God and to protect the reputation of his family and the community by saying "He is beside himself." Which is a nice way of saying he was crazy.

Can you picture it. Jesus went home last year, and his neighbors and friends decided he was crazy. "Maybe now," he might have thought, "time has passed. Things have happened. Maybe now they will believe." So he went home again.

He went back because he wouldn't give up on the people he loved. Jesus never gave up. Even hanging on a cross, he wouldn't say "no."

There is a theme song from a favorite tv show that says Sometimes you want to go Where everybody knows your name, And they're always glad you came. Sometimes we stay or return to our hometown for just that very reason. We want to find acceptance.

So everyone can call us Norm when
we walk in just like on Cheers.
But there is an older adage from 2 BC
that says that familiarity breeds contempt.

The front page story on the Nazareth Times
reads the headline "Local Boy Makes Good"
followed by a report on the miracles
that Jesus had been performing.

If we looked back at previous episodes
of Mark we would see over the last two weeks
that Jesus taught the people on the shore of Lake Galilee,
he then calmed the storm on the lake
and when he reached the other side of the lake
he drove out the demons of a possessed man,
healed the woman with the hemorrhage
and raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.
So pretty much routine run of the mill things.

And undoubtedly in the letters to editor column
you would have found a letter by one of the
religious leaders criticizing him in some way.

Then in verse 2 when the Sabbath came
he began to teach in the synagogue and
many who heard him were amazed. Atonished.
Where did this man get all this?
What is the wisdom given to him?
He even does miracles!

We use that word pretty loosely nowadays.
This week we remembered the man
who made the Music City Miracle.
We remembered the life of Steve McNair
and also Michael Jackson.

They were accepted by us or at least many of us.
We accepted them as winners in their respective fields.
Would McNair have had this kind of following
or that kind of funeral if he had been a third string
quarterback on the losing Detroit Lions for instance?

What if Michael had not been the
top selling artist of all time?
Celebrities are winners to us.

If they were not winners would we be
so willing to ignore the situation in
which Steve was found in?
Or all the controversy surrounding Michael
and children over the years?

Now I don't think someone's personal life
should tarnish their accomplishments
as an athlete or a musician but the prophet in me
rises up when I hear people say for instance
that Steve was a good moral role model.
Really?

He was a great football player,
a great humanitarian with a big heart by all accounts
but I don't believe personally that he was
a good moral role model at this time in his life.
We all have failings yes
but we are also all accountable for
our actions and their consequences.

So many times this week I heard
what a great person he was in the midst of learning
that he was having an affair on his wife and his kids
and that everyone seemed to know about it and condone it.
Nobody's perfect I heard again and again
as some kind of litany that makes what
we do wrong in our life right.

Do we really give winners that much leeway
that they can do things that if ordinary people
did them they would be held accountable for?
I appreciated Steve Fisher and his comments
about the Steve I knew.
He said the Steve I knew would say he was sorry.
Fisher never glossed over the moral nature
of what was going on as he paid tribute to the man.

Our flaws shouldn't ruin us
but neither should they be ignored.
I pray more for Mechelle and her children for strength
as she has been caught up in something
she never could have imagined I am sure.

But instead we focus on Steve and
even Michael because we like winners.

Our culture, our country, our society
is caught up with the idea of winning.
Winning, succeeding, getting ahead,
overcoming great obstacles these are the ideals,
these are the goals that society places on all people.

We can see this as evidenced by our
preoccupation with sports in general.
We like to see our team win.
We like to follow a winner.
If you lose one game what does that make you? A loser.
No matter what else you do you are a loser.

Forget what you might have done in the past
or what your record was, if you lose or have a bad season
the solution is to get rid of the coach.
Michigan. Tennessee. Auburn.
All winning coaches who became losers quickly.

But not only in sports, but throughout all of life,
we like to see and know about
people who have succeeded.
We like to read, or watch stories on TV of people
who have overcome great mental or physical obstacles,
then making a success of their lives.

In 1982 a story appeared in the Des Moines Register
about a high school basketball player who hurt himself
while weight lifting, and how he had broken
and strained something in his back to a point
where the doctors didn't know if he would walk again.

But the feeling in his legs returned,
and now the boy was at the gym trying
to learn to run and shoot baskets again.
The article talked about his winning attitude,
about the way he has overcome his accident,
how he was making himself a winner again.

That is a great story but I wonder if they
would have printed the article,
if this boy had remained paralyzed from the neck down
and then had to live the every day unglamorous struggle
of having someone feed him, dress him,
help him in the toilet.

I wonder if they would have printed this article
showing the frustration, the hurt,
the helplessness that someone who is paralyzed feels.
I wonder if they would have told about
the pain of isolation, the hurt of rejection,
the feeling that society doesn't like losers only winners?
I wonder why we only hear about those
who make it back, and not about those who are
daily struggling with the brokenness of life?

There are many people who live lives
of quiet brokenness and frustration,
sensing, feeling the strong cultural preoccupation
with winning, getting ahead and knowing
they have given their all, they have tried,
but cannot break out of their individual brokenness
and have to live day in and day out
with the consequences of this struggle.

But with Jesus there is a paradox.
His strength comes from weakness.
We expect him to be a hero like a Superman
who comes with strength and power and instead
he shows up like a Spider-man who
doesn't seem the hero type.

Jesus is a winner in this passage as he does
wonderful things until he apparently says something
that isn't popular and he becomes a loser.
He was rejected. Is not this the carpenter?
Isn't this Mary's son
and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon
and aren't his sister here with us?
And they took offense at him.

They were angry.
The Greek word here for offended means
something that causes one to trip or fall.
In other words they recognized the words of wisdom
and that he did many miracles and wonders
but the thing that tripped them up
was the fact they could not believe that Jesus
could be used by God in such a mighty way.

Have you ever made a serious misjudgment
about something or someone?

Listen to some of these misjudgments.
I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.
Thomas Watson, IBM Chairman, 1943
There is no reason that anyone would want
a computer in their home. Ken Olson, President, Digital Equip. Corp, 1977.

I'm just glad it'll be Clark Gable falling on his face
and not Gary Cooper. Gary Cooper on his decision
not to accept the leading role in Gone with the Wind.

Drill for oil? You mean drill into the ground
and try to find oil? You're crazy. Drillers who Edwin Drake
tried to enlist for his project to drill for oil in 1859.

Those are some pretty bad misjudgments.
But they are insignificant compared to
the misjudgment the people make here.
They misjudged Jesus.
They rejected him.
And why because they knew him.
They saw him as one of them.
In their eyes he wasn't somebody special.

How do some folks see Jesus?
Some see Jesus as Mary's baby boy.
There are many folks today,
who claim to have a relationship with God,
who claim to have received Christ into their hearts
who are stuck with the vision of Jesus in the manger.
This is a beautiful scene, God himself,
laying aside all his glory that he may
come to this sin-sick earth.
Many folks worship the baby in the manger,
but he is far more than that.

Everyone even the society outside our doors
love Christmas but you don't see them
celebrate Good Friday as much do you?
He grew, and walked and talked and taught the people
and laid down his life for you and me.
We are limiting Jesus when
we leave him in the manger.

And the reference referring to Jesus
as the son of Mary is a
derogatory way of referring to Jesus.

In the first century, sons were identified by reference to their fathers.

Some see Jesus as the carpenter's son. Those listening to the life changing words of Jesus that day in the synagogue did not hear the real message, because they were limited with their own thoughts of who this man was in their presence.

We must also remember the image that the people had in their minds of Jesus. He had left Nazareth alone, and as a carpenter. He returns with a group of followers, and as a Rabbi.

It is also important to note that when Jesus left town, some of the townsfolk probably frowned upon his leaving. Remember that Jesus was the oldest male child in his family. Joseph was now dead and if the father of the family was dead, the oldest male child was expected to assume the role of the head of the household and stay around to provide for the family.

Jesus may have been viewed by some, as the son who shirked his family duties and responsibilities by leaving the family to fend for themselves.

His neighbors were probably not too eager to welcome this deserting self-proclaimed prophet back into their circle of friends. You would think that the people of Nazareth would have welcomed Jesus as a local boy made good and rolled out the red carpet for him. But instead, they took offense at him.

Some see a prophet. Jesus talking to his disciples, asked them, "who do men say that I am". Their response was that some saw him as a prophet. While in the strictest sense of the word, yes Jesus was a prophet, he was and is far more than a prophet. Many folks today, if you ask them

if they believe in Jesus, will respond that yes,
they do believe in Jesus.
They will tell you that Jesus was a good man.
He was a mighty prophet of God.
A great teacher.
They have a limited vision of Jesus Christ.
They only see what is comfortable for them to bear.
They see enough that they do not have
to change their lives because of him.

Mark does not tell us exactly what
it was Jesus said that day in the synagogue,
but we can assume that he probably read
from the Book of Isaiah which would have been customary.
We remember another time when
Jesus was in the synagogue.
When he read Scriptures, the congregation
ran out covering their ears, ready to stone him.
That particular day he told of the
coming of the Messiah and then said,
"Today the Scriptures have been
fulfilled within your hearing."

The people in the synagogue took offense
not only because of what Jesus said,
but because of who it was that said it.
They were amazed and offended because
they expected the extraordinary
and spectacular in the Messiah,
a winner in the highest order.

They could not believe that the Messiah
would be a simple, ordinary carpenter,
the son of Mary with ordinary brothers and sisters
who leaves town quietly and returns
a couple of years later to visit his deserted family.

But as disciples of Christ that
is what we believe.
We see Jesus as the Son of God.
And when we limit Jesus and what he can do
we reject him as his town did.

And he answers only in his hometown,
among his relatives and in his own house
is a prophet without honor.

And he could do no miracles there
and he was amazed at their lack of faith.
Acceptance or Rejection.
That is a major decision we have to make
as disciples of Christ.

Do we accept that he is the Son of God,
not simply a great prophet or a teacher?

C.S. Lewis one of my favorite authors
says I am trying here to prevent anyone saying
the really foolish thing that people often say about Him:
'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher,
but I don't accept His claim to be God.'
That is the one thing we must not say.
A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things
Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.
He would either be a lunatic -- on the level with the man
who says he is a poached egg --
or else he would be the Devil of Hell.
You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is,
the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.
You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him
and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet
and call Him Lord and God.
But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense
about His being a great human teacher.
He has not left that open to us.
He did not intend to.

There are times that we limit what God can do
because we have accepted Christ without faith.
We still expect to see only with our eyes.
But true faith is when God is not in the wind,
when God is not in the earthquake
and when God is not in the fire.

True faith is trusting God in the quiet.
Trusting God when you see or feel nothing,
but just taking God at God's word.
Sometimes God comes in waves of power and glory
but sometimes God comes in a still
small voice of a carpenter's son.

When Jesus asked his disciples the question,
"who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered, "thou art the Christ,
the Son of the Living God.
Peter's vision was not limited to what
he saw with the physical eye.
He accepted Jesus.

Jesus answered and said to him.
Blessed you are Simon, son of Jonah for flesh
and blood did not reveal it to you
but my Father who is in heaven.
So what is it going to be acceptance or rejection?

There is another famous quote
about familiarity from Mark Twain:
It is true that familiarity breeds contempt
and the reason we hold truth in such respect
is because we have so little
opportunity to get familiar with it.
Are you ready to accept him fully
as the truth, the way the life?

And if you have done that
are you ready to go out and serve him?
Because that is the next part of this passage.
The disciples who accepted this Messiah
went out in his name two by two to witness
and face rejection wherever they went.
Luke 6:46: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,'
and not do what I tell you?"

An inscription on the Cathedral in Lubeck, Germany, says:
You call me Master, and obey me not;
You call me Light, and see me not;
You call me the Way, and walk me not;
You call me the Life, and live me not;
You call me Wise, and follow me not;
You call me Fair, and love me not;
You call me Rich, and ask me not;
You call me Eternal and seek me not.
If I condemn thee, blame me not!

Christ can only do what we allow him to do.
From a human perspective the adage
"Familiarity breeds contempt" has some truth to it.
However, from a divine perspective,
God is fully familiar with us

and loves us with an everlasting love.
And the more fully we know God the more fully
we can love God too.

Will we accept Jesus' miracle into our lives
and believe or will he find another town
another community of faith where he can
do nothing because of our unbelief.
The choice is ours. Amen.