

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 and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked. ²³ Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’ ” ²⁴ “I tell you the truth,” 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 down the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. ³¹ Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. ³² They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

If Jesus came to preach here next Sunday, would you come to hear him? Would our church be filled to overflowing so that we had to set chairs in all three services? Would you cancel your hockey tournament to come to church – if Jesus were preaching? Would you climb out of bed and give up that one morning to sleep in – if Jesus came to town?

I think that it is interesting that Jesus chose to reveal himself to the people of his home town by preaching to them in the synagogue. He didn’t do a miracle. He didn’t stand on the street corner and shout. He went to church and preached the sermon that day based on a familiar text from Isaiah. And that is how Jesus still makes himself known to his people today. Jesus comes to us in the Word and through the sacraments. He reveals himself in the writings of the prophets and the apostles and in the preaching of our pastors. Jesus is hear every Sunday. Why would you ever want to miss an opportunity to hear Jesus preach to you?

It is sad that the people in Nazareth treated Jesus the way they did. At first they just kind of said, “Who’s this guy? Isn’t this little Jesus, Joseph’s son?” And when Jesus challenged them, they became so angry they wanted to throw him off the cliff! What was it that set them off? Why were they offended by Jesus? It leads us to ask the question.

Are you offended by Jesus?

A. Because you’ve known Jesus all our life

So let’s pick up this story which is a continuation from the gospel we heard last Sunday. Remember Pastor Nass’ sermon? Jesus went to his hometown in Nazareth, where he grew up,

and went to the synagogue ... as was his custom. It was not unusual for the people in Nazareth to see Jesus in the synagogue. He'd been doing some traveling and they heard that Jesus had gotten quite a reputation as a teacher, a rabbi. Everyone probably knew that he would be invited to read the text and preach the sermon that Sunday.

Remember the text he read? What a beautiful text! **“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, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Luke 4: 18-19** What beautiful good news in those words. The Messiah would come and bring freedom, freedom from their sins. The Messiah would proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, the year where every debt to sin would be cancelled and every slave to sin set free. Great text!

So what about the sermon? Jesus said, **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** He said in effect, “This scripture is about me. Isaiah was talking about me. I am the Messiah who came to set you free from your sins and to proclaim the year of God’s favor to you.” This is not the kind of Messiah the average Jewish person was looking for. They were looking for a national hero who would kick out the Romans and make their kingdom a great kingdom again.

How did the people react? How could this be Jesus! This is Joseph’s little boy. We saw him grow up. Yeah, he was different, but this guy is no superman! They knew Jesus so well that they didn’t see anything special about him. I find that hard to believe! Didn’t they see the perfect child of Mary as someone special? Didn’t they seem him as a teenager in the synagogue asking the hard questions and offering the right answers? There is a proverb that says, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” You get so used to something that it isn’t special anymore. It doesn’t mean anything to you.

Every Sunday school teacher experiences this if you teach in all the grades. When you taught the kids in kindergarten a new story, their eyes were wide with excitement. Wow! Jesus walked on water! Wow, Jesus raised a man from the dead! But when you teach these same stories to those in the seventh grade, you hardly get any reaction at all. “We’ve heard that story before. Tell us something new!”

Could you be offended by Jesus because you have heard his story so many times that it doesn’t mean much to you anymore? I think there is a warning here for everyone – and especially for young people today. When you get to high school or college, you hear all kinds of new ideas. New ideas are always exciting. They get you thinking. You like to talk about them with your friends. You start to question some of the things you learned from the Bible. “Did God really say?” You know who asked that question. It was Satan, when he tempted Eve in the garden and convinced her to disobey God.

There is a Bible passage that says, **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”** Being the same doesn’t have to be boring. When will you ever get tired of hearing the words, “Your sins are forgiven?” When will you ever get tired of hearing the words, “You will rise again on the last day?” When will you ever get tired of the promise that Jesus hears your

misery and sees your trouble and answers your prayers? One of our hymns says it beautifully. “Ashamed of Jesus, yes I may, when I’ve no sins to wash away.” Don’t ever let yourself grow tired of Jesus!

What else might offend us about Jesus?

B. Because there is nothing politically correct about Jesus.

PC – political correctness – is one of the social pressures that Satan uses today to turn our backs on Jesus. I watched a video clip from an interview of Tim Keller, a conservative Presbyterian pastor who is a very good preacher. He’s quite famous. The interviewer asked him a pointed question. “Dr. Keller, do you believe that Muslims and Jews and Sikhs are not going to heaven?” I thought he would answer clearly, but he didn’t. He backpedaled. He evaded the question. You could tell he didn’t want to say this on public television. The man asked the question again, more pointedly. And Dr. Keller tried to explain that only Jesus is the Son of God. So he asked the question again ... and never really got a straight answer.

Jesus wasn’t afraid to give people a straight answer. That’s why the people in the synagogue of Nazareth got so upset. ²² **All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.** ²³ **Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’ ”** ²⁴ **“I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.”** They spoke well of him, but they did not believe in him. They did not believe that he was the Messiah, sent from God. Jesus could have walked out of the synagogue and had his buddies patting him on the back. But he pushed them to see and to acknowledge who he really was.

There is nothing politically correct about Jesus. Jesus spoke clearly in John 14: 6, when he said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Listen to what Jesus says. No one comes to the Father except through him. If you want to go to heaven, then you have to believe in Jesus. There is no other way. And if you say that out loud in a public forum today, people will become angry with you, just the way the people in Nazareth got angry with Jesus. You will be labeled as intolerant and a bigot and a hateful person.

In that moment, will you be offended by Jesus? Will you decide to join the crowd and turn away from Jesus? Will you back pedal on your confession so that you don’t have to stand out in the crowd? Will you just remain silent so that no one will hear what you believe? I think it is significant that after Jesus’ resurrection and the day of Pentecost, we don’t see anyone of Jesus’ disciples going soft on proclaiming Jesus to be the only Savior, no matter how much the world hated them for it, and no matter how much they had to suffer for it.

Because what if it is true? Jesus finished his sermon in Nazareth and confronted the unbelief of the Nazarenes, not because he hated them, but because he loved them. What if it is true, that Jesus is the only way to heaven? Wouldn’t you want to tell your friend about Jesus, if this is

true? Wouldn't you want to risk being criticized and even hated by the world, if it means that by your confession you might save some?

“Ashamed of Jesus, that dear Friend, On whom my hopes of heaven depend? No; when I blush, be this my shame, That I no more revere His name.” Are you offended by Jesus ...

C. Because Jesus takes away what you treasure the most in life.

I'm not talking about your money. Jesus doesn't take it away. He sanctifies it for holy purposes. He fills your heart with such pure motives and such godly desires that you use your money for things that mean the most to you. You would rather spend it on your family than yourself. You would rather help the poor than buy expensive things. Jesus doesn't take away your money, he just makes it more useful to you.

He doesn't take away your freedom, either. You heard about that last Sunday. People think they are free when they can commit any sin they want. Only that's not freedom. It's slavery. Jesus sets you free to do what God wants you to do with our life. Jesus gives you the freedom to live as a child of God.

So what great treasure does Jesus take away? He takes away the thing that you treasure the most, what you guard most carefully. He takes away your pride, your self-approval. Do you see that in our text? The people in Nazareth suffered from the false idea that most of the people of Israel did at that time. They took pride in being Abraham's children. They thought that they had it made with God, just because of their race.

And Jesus confronted their pride, didn't he? He made two references to Old Testament stories. One was from our Old Testament lesson this morning. Why did God send Elijah to the widow who was NOT an Israelite? And why did God heal Naaman, the Leper, who was NOT an Israelite? Because the people of Israel had rejected the true God of Israel, and rejected God's prophets, and did not believe. This made them so angry that they tried to kill Jesus by throwing him off the cliff.

Dear friends, if you are going to believe in Jesus and not be offended by him, then you must lose all your pride and your sense of self-approval. If you think you are a pretty good person, your pride has deceived you, and you don't really appreciate how your sinful nature has affected everything you say and think and do. If you think that you are somehow better than the tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners who sat at Jesus' feet, then you will have no time for Jesus. I will only take pride in myself.

First, Jesus must take away all of your pride. And what does he give you instead? He lets you rejoice and glory in God's approval of you. One of Jesus' disciples, John, wrote a letter and gave us these words. **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”** You ARE children of God. You WILL see Jesus in heaven. Why?

Because you think you are somebody? No. Because Jesus died for you. Because God calls you his children. That is what you are!

Till then--nor is the boasting vain-- Till then I boast a Savior slain. And oh, may this my portion be, That Christ is not ashamed of me!