

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Jesus “*went away from there,*” namely from Jairus’ home where He had raised Jairus’ dead daughter from the dead, where shortly before He had healed a woman with a chronic flow of blood, where faith was so apparent, where Jesus commended it: “*your faith has made you well; go in peace*” (Mark 5:34), and “*Do not fear, only believe*” (Mark 5:36). Jesus went away from there and went to His hometown of Nazareth.

What a contrast! The same teaching that had wowed the crowds at Capernaum, as Jesus “*taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes*” (Mark 1:22), teaching “*with [an] authority*” (Mark 1:27) that moved that woman and that synagogue ruler to faith, that teaching was met with disdain in His hometown. Jesus had spoken words that the unclean spirits obeyed, that cleansed lepers (Mark 1:41-42), that caused the lame to walk, and the people loved it; they flocked to Jesus; they “*glorified God*” (Mark 2:12) — but not those in His hometown, not His relatives, not those of His own house. They rejected Jesus. They dismissed His teaching. They doubted His “*mighty works.*” They belittled His background — nothing but a “*carpenter, the son of Mary,*” the latter perhaps an insult because they knew and disbelieved the story of His unusual pedigree. Born of a virgin — Ha! “*A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.*” And “*He marveled because of their unbelief.*”

What a lesson for us! Not everyone received Jesus’ message with open arms. Jesus’ hometown rejected His preaching — at this time even some of His own family did. Should we expect anything different? After all, Jesus was sent to the same “*rebellious house*” of Israel that Ezekiel was — impudent, stubborn, prideful people, who often refused to listen.

We see this contrast in our own country — between believers and unbelievers, for we live in a country with rebellious people, who refuse to listen to the Lord’s word, who legislate the wrong, who refuse to uphold the right, who persecute God’s faithful people. I’m thinking this week about a Christian sister Barronelle Stutzman of Arlene’s Flowers in Washington state. Just this week, the Supreme Court refused to hear her appeal. I’m thinking of the Christian brother Jack Phillips, the Colorado cake artist, who, after winning his Supreme Court battle, is fighting still for his right to choose which messages to express in his cake artistry. Must Christian businesses in America with its 1st Amendment protections be forced to communicate messages that promote sin?

Perhaps, we Christians in this country have become conceited. As much as we take pride in our country and its freedoms, perhaps we bought into the notion that America was God’s chosen Zion, and that God’s eternal promises applied to

America. It takes a thorn or two to burst such erroneous thinking, and attacks like 9/11 and Supreme Court decisions like Obergefell legalizing same-sex marriage and more recently Bostock asserting that self-chosen gender is to be treated the same as biological sex, may be such thorns. The rejection of Barronelle's appeal, all so that she might — that we might — fall in line with the state's orthodoxy, though the Supreme Court majority assured the country that allowing same-sex couples to marry “would pose no risk of harm to . . . third parties” (Obergefell, Opinion of the Court, 27), may be a thorn from God to awaken us to our conceit.

Or during this pandemic, governors became messengers of Satan, some of them considering churches no more significant or necessary than movie theaters or concert halls — and less significant than casinos and marijuana shops, and so they shut church services down that they might shut Christians up. Where is our conceit now? Do we feel humbled yet? Are we going to be silenced? Or are we ready defiantly to lift up our voices and proclaim Christ?

Indeed, I suggest, that's exactly what Jesus' hometown and relatives were trying to do to Jesus in Nazareth: shut Him up by discrediting Him. They were certainly not successful with Him! Jesus continued to teach, though never again in Nazareth. It's as if Jesus shook “*off the dust that [was] on [His] feet as a testimony against them.*” But then He began going about the cities of Galilee, in a circuit, preaching and teaching and doing mighty works there.

More than that, Jesus sent out His disciples in pairs, thus extending His influence. Far from stopping the Gospel from going forth, Jesus' rejection in Nazareth only increased it. Nor would Jesus' ultimate rejection and death in Jerusalem stop His Gospel from being proclaimed. Much like this time, after Jesus had risen from the dead and “*presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs*” (Acts 1:3), Jesus sent His disciples forth as His commissioned witnesses: “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). The Jewish leaders tried to shut them up too — unsuccessfully, for “*[w]e must obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29).

And we, Christ's body, the Church, though we're not all apostles or prophets or teachers — Barronelle is a florist, Jack is a cake artist, Brush and Nib is an art studio, etc. — nevertheless, we are all members of this body (1 Cor. 12:27-31). We all have “lips to sing [Christ's] glory, Tongues [His] mercy to proclaim, Throats [to] shout the hope that fills us, Mouths to speak [His] holy name” (LSB578:5). God grant us the courage and the will to use them.

Moreover, the Church's message hasn't changed. Recall, that Jesus preached: “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the*

gospel” (Mark 1:15). The disciples had learned that lesson, for in today’s Gospel we hear how the disciples “*went [forth] and proclaimed that people should repent.*” Luke records the resurrected Jesus instructing the disciples of the content of their message going forward, and it’s the same: preach “*repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” (Luke 24:47). And that’s exactly what they preached as Peter’s Pentecost Day example shows: “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*” (Acts 2:38); and as the disciples’ bold preaching shows: “*The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*” (Acts 5:29-31). No, there was no softening of the message to make it more palatable — not of sin, not of repentance, not of Christ, not of the cross, not of forgiveness, not of salvation, not of holy living — no softening then and none today.

For these things can certainly be an offense. They were to Jesus’ homies and they still can be for us. Nevertheless, “*in season and out of season*” (2 Tim. 4:2), these are the things we are given to proclaim; these are the words of eternal life. Whether received or rejected, we preach God’s word of law to “*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*” sinners (2 Tim. 4:2); and we preach God’s word of Gospel to convert sinners, to forgive, build up, and save them (Rom. 1:16).

People may reject this message; in fact, don’t be surprised if they do; they rejected Jesus. And they may come after you; don’t be deterred by this thorn. Be confident in your salvation in Christ Jesus. Boast in your own weaknesses. Be content with your “*weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.*” Remember Jesus’ words to you in such times: “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” Rejoice that you have been “*counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name*” of Jesus (Acts 5:41). Take comfort in this Gospel: that you are in Christ, and in Christ, “*when [you are] weak, then [you are] strong.*”

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.