

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Who knows you the best? Probably most of us would say our family — for those of us who are married, our spouse. But we might think also of childhood friends or relatives, those in our hometown.

Jesus wasn't married, but He did grow up in the town of Nazareth. You recall that the Holy Family fled to Egypt to escape from the murderous rampage of King Herod the Great. And when Herod died, the family moved back to Israel and settled up in Nazareth in Galilee.

Today, we hear how Jesus returned to his hometown after having healed the woman with the chronic flow of blood and raised from the dead the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. In those encounters, faith had been so apparent. Jesus commended it: "*your faith has made you well; go in peace*" (Mark 5:34), Jesus said to the woman; and "*Do not fear, only believe*" (Mark 5:36), was Jesus' instruction to Jairus and family ... and surely they did.

These people showed themselves to be ones who truly knew Jesus for who He was. Not so, the hometown folk. They didn't get Jesus, and they didn't believe in Him either. Perhaps He was to them just that twelve-year-old boy that had caused His parents so much grief when He stayed behind in Jerusalem. They may not have known about His amazing understanding and answers (Luke 2:47). To them, He was but an ordinary carpenter whose mother and brothers and sisters, they knew.

Surely, they did not know all of the apocryphal stories about Jesus' childhood spewed from the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (www.gnosis.org/library/inftoma.htm). I wrote about that in the Voice that should be coming your way. That so-called gospel told stories about some amazing things that Jesus did as a child, things like Jesus forming birds out of clay, and giving them life by clapping His hands, saying "Go!" to them (II); things like Jesus getting angry at a child that messed up a pool of water, scolding the child and withering him up like a tree, leaves, root, and fruit, like Jesus did to the fruitless fig tree (Mark 11:12-14). "And straightway that lad withered up wholly," this gnostic gospel claims (III).

Let me suggest that if Jesus had done such things, surely the whole town would have known about them and the One who did them. If Jesus had done these things, the people of Nazareth wouldn't have had to ask, now that He returned: "*Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?*" They would have been familiar with Jesus' divine wisdom and power.

And, just to be clear, these stories are fake; they're made up; they're contained in a false, so-called gospel. The ancient world produced such writings, but they're

not true and they're not good news. Let no one say that Pastor Punke is preaching "*to you a gospel contrary to the one [Paul and the apostles] preached to you*" (Gal. 1:8), lest the apostolic curse fall upon me.

Jesus had been preaching and teaching and doing mighty works. His notoriety was spreading far and wide. The people were believing in Him. But not in His hometown. It gives a different perspective to "*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him*" (John 1:11).

He was not welcomed in His own hometown; His own neighbors and relatives refused to believe in Him, even with reports of His marvelous teaching, even with reports of His mighty works. Jesus scolded them: "*A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.*" Truly, Jesus was sent as a prophet to a rebellious, impudent, stubborn people. And He did no mighty works among them, but went on to other towns to continue His work.

Jesus also sent out apostles, commissioning them to preach with His own authority, and to cleanse people with unclean spirits. But He also sent them out with a warning. Be prepared to be rejected, and when they are, Jesus told them, "*shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.*"

Dear friends, should we expect anything different for us? Should we not expect rejection as Jesus did? Should we not go forward boldly, rejoicing that we are "*counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name*" of Jesus (Acts 5:41)?

We are surrounded by the same kind of people that Jesus and the apostles encountered: impudent people who call us names for our faithfulness and godliness, rebellious people who want to cast God and Jesus His Son out of all public discourse, stubborn people who hear the message of repentance and the good news of forgiveness and refuse to believe them. Nevertheless, should we not go forth boldly "*teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus*" (Acts 5:42) according to the apostolic example, preaching the apostolic word?

In Jesus' day, He was not able to do many mighty works because of the people's unbelief. He left and went to other cities. The apostles, too, departed from those who refused to listen. Luther too once remarked: "O my beloved Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God's grace and word while it is there! For you should know that God's word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. ... when it's gone it's gone ... And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year." (*Luther's Works*, 45:352).

America is no different. Jesus will withdraw His gracious hand from our land, too, for our people's impudent, rebellious, stubborn ways. He will give them "*up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity ... to dishonorable passions ... to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done*" (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28), to be "*filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice ... of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.*" Our land has become filled with "*gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless,*" filled with people "*not only [who] do [these things] but [who] give approval to those who practice them*" (Rom. 1:29-32). On this Sunday following our Independence Day, we pray that the rain will continue to shower upon our nation.

Yet, the rejection of the Gospel in our country is a thorn in the side of Christians here who seek after godliness, who work to produce the fruit of the Spirit in "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Gal. 5:22-23). Like St. Paul, we pray for it all to be taken away, and we trust that God will do His will in His own time. Let us not lose heart if our prayer is not answered as we desire it or as soon as we would have it. Jesus says also to us: "Trust in me." "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*"

Let us remember our Lord Jesus who came in weakness into our flesh, born in lowliness, laid in a manger, no crib for a bed. Let us remember our Lord Jesus who was despised and rejected by men. Let us remember our Lord Jesus who in weakness experienced mockery and scorn, the suffering of the cross, and the pain of death. But let us remember that by this weakness, by this foolishness, by His wounds, we are healed; we are saved.

Let us remember that our Lord Jesus rose victorious from the grave, and that He conquers death for us, too, so that we, who still experience "*weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities*" — for people still don't get us — we can say, I will rejoice in these; I will boast in these; I will be content in these, for we know that we have Jesus; we have the victory; we have life; and we have His promise.

God grant that we might recognize that all this is sufficient for us, too, so that we might continue to go forth with Christ at our side, Christ's name in our mouths, Christ's love in our hands.

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