

“Family Ties”

Mark 6:1-6a ¹

Actor Cary Grant was walking down the street one day and met a fellow who stopped him excitedly and said, “Wait a minute! You’re . . . you’re . . . I know who you are. Don’t tell me. You’re Rock Hudson . . . no, you’re . . .” Grant thought he’d help the fellow out and finished the sentence for him: “Cary Grant.”

And the fellow said, “No, no, that’s not it! You’re . . . Just give me a moment!” There was Cary Grant himself, identifying himself with his own name, but the fellow didn’t recognize him because he had someone else in mind.² Hang onto that thought as we move through time and space back to a synagogue service in first-century Nazareth.

You may remember that in previous chapters, Mark told us about Jesus’ amazing stilling of a terrible storm, His casting out of a “legion” of Demons, His healing of a woman’s hemorrhage, and His raising of a dead girl back to life. It wouldn’t be too much to say that Jesus was “on a roll,” and we might be excused for expecting such resounding successes to continue. Today’s encounter disabuses us of such ideas.

Jesus has returned home to Nazareth and has come to worship in His “home synagogue.” Over the years, I’ve returned from time to time to the church where I grew up, or to my parents’ current church, or to churches where I’ve been a member or have been on staff, and those visits are always just a little bit uncertain.

How will these people remember me? Will they be glad to see me? Will I remember the names of all the persons who expect to be remembered? What will they think about who I’ve become now? I’ll bet you’ve had similar experiences.

So it was quite natural that Jesus would visit the village of Nazareth, where He had grown up, and where His family still lived. And of course, if a Sabbath fell during that visit, Jesus would be found in that old familiar synagogue as well.

And it was just as natural for the Ruler of the Synagogue to call on Jesus to read the Scripture or to speak at such a time as it would be for us to do a similar thing with one of our own young adults. Mark doesn’t give us much information about what Jesus said or did, noting only that the congregation was amazed at His teaching. Matthew’s account is about as brief as Mark’s; but Luke fills out the story for us.³

Luke tells us that Jesus was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and was invited to read and to speak. Jesus turned in the scroll to the place where it is written that “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to*

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on April 2, 2017. This story also appears in Matthew 13:53-58; similar story in Luke 4:16-30.

Sources for this sermon include: Barclay, William, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954); Culpeper, Alan, “Mark,” *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007); Garland, David E. “Mark,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Lane, William, “The Gospel According to Mark,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Turlington, Henry, “Mark,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969); Wessell, Walter, “Mark,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke. Digital Version.

² Robert Simms, Boone, NC; *Leadership*, vol. 11, no. 4.

³ It is not absolutely certain that all three Synoptic Gospels are describing the same visit, but it is hard to imagine such as thing as Luke describes happening more than once, and Luke’s account seems congruent with Matthew and Mark.

proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come" (Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61:1-2).

The text was familiar enough, but no one in the room was prepared for what came next. Jesus rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down to teach. As everyone beamed expectantly, Jesus said, "*The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!*" (Luke 4:21), which was very nearly the same thing as claiming to be God's promised Messiah.

Now that wasn't what they expected . . . at all. The people were astonished at such a claim, and they were offended, too—so much so that Luke reports that they adjourned the service and tried to throw Jesus off a cliff! Jesus was amazed by their unbelief, and this is the last time He went to any synagogue, at least in the Gospel of Mark.

As the people scoffed at Jesus, Mark tells us that they said to one another, "*He's just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us*" (Mark 6:3).⁴

It's interesting that this verse is the only place where Jesus himself is referred to as a "carpenter." The word Mark used—*τεκτον* ("tekton")—is actually a much broader term than today's idea of a carpenter. A *tekton* could also be a brick mason or a blacksmith. Indeed, a *tekton* could work with wood, metal, or stone. Such men were known to build ships as well as houses and other buildings—indeed, a *tekton* could often build just about anything, from furniture to entire houses. I've known men like that, and you may have, too.

The fact that none of these accounts mentions Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, leads most scholars to conclude that Joseph had died by this time and that Jesus, as the oldest son and oldest child, had been managing their *tekton* business. This means that Jesus must have been technically skilled and physically strong; and when the neighbors referred to Him as "just a carpenter," they weren't saying anything negative about such work.

The Jews of that day honored and respected skilled tradesmen. That wasn't the issue at all. But in that day and time, as in some cultures still, there was very little social mobility, and one was expected to remain in the class and status into which one was born.

So, even had Jesus not been claiming to be Messiah, His arrival with His disciples in tow—as respected rabbis usually did—meant to them that Jesus was overreaching His background, status, and training. "He's too big for his britches," was their offended conclusion. "He's from the Hood, just like we are. *Who does he think he is?*"

In these early days, Jesus' family had similar feelings. Early in His public ministry, Jesus' family thought He had gone mad (Mark 3:21); and even late in His ministry, His brothers were still making fun of Him (John 7:2-5). Apparently no one in Nazareth—not even Jesus' family—had thought of Him as a prodigy or had said to Him, "I always knew you would grow up to be the Messiah." Nobody seemed to notice the halo that Jesus frequently has in Christian art—especially when He was young.

⁴ In order to support the unbiblical idea of the "perpetual virginity of Mary," some traditions hold that these siblings were from a prior marriage of Joseph. Not only is this idea completely unsubstantiated by the text, but such an eventuality would mean that Jesus was not Joseph's firstborn and would not be first in line for the Davidic throne. Some traditions also suggest names for Jesus' half-sisters, though Scripture does not name them: Lysia, Lydia, Mary, Anna, and Salome have all been suggested.

Now to be fair, Jesus' brother, James, later became the leader of the Jerusalem church. His brother, Jude, also wrote a letter that is preserved in our Bible. And tradition has it that after James was martyred (the third named martyr after Stephen and James the son of Zebedee), Jesus' brother, Simon, was chosen to lead the Jerusalem church (he was also martyred). Paul later referred to "the Lord's brothers" as doing missionary work (1 Corinthians 9:5), so it may be that all of Jesus' half-brothers eventually came to believe that He really was God's Messiah . . . but it was not so in the beginning.

On this particular occasion, a few neighbors mustered enough faith to bring their sick family members to Jesus, and He healed them. But the general level of unbelief in the community caused Jesus to "shake the dust off His feet" and move on to more fertile ground (Mark 6:11).

It is sometimes the case for us, too, that we have to leave home in order to become who we were meant to be. Jesus refused to be bound by the limiting assumptions of His family and friends. He may have been amazed by their unbelief, but He was not stopped by it.

And Mark has now developed an interesting point and counterpoint between the reception Jesus received from the demons and evil spirits and the reception He received from His family, friends, and religious leaders. The spirits know that He is "the Holy One of God" (1:24), "the Son of God" (3:11), and "Son of the Most High God (5:7); but the people say, "Why does this fellow talk like that?" (2:7) and "Isn't he just a carpenter?" (6:3).

And in this is a challenge for us, as well. It seems to me that our familiarity with the stories of Jesus has a tendency to breed, if not actually contempt, then at least a dismissive attitude. The stories of Jesus can easily become humdrum. We can lose our sense of awe, taking an attitude much like those of the synagogue folk in Nazareth: "I already know all about Jesus. What could He possibly teach me now?"

The whole thing feels a good bit like Hans Christian Andersen's fable of *The Ugly Duckling*, a story in which the true nature and identity of the unusual sibling is hidden, and mockery and teasing are the order of the day. But there came a day in which the true nature of the "duckling" was revealed; and there will be such a day for our Lord Christ as well.

During His life among us, Jesus chose to empty Himself of His divine power and glory so that He could become the Perfect Sacrifice that releases us from Sin. But there will be a day when we see Him as He really is. Here is the Lord Christ as John saw Him in his vision:

Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. . . . He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title . . . was King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11-16).⁵

My friends, when Jesus took on human form, He chose to set aside His rights as God; but when Jesus was asking questions as a boy in the Temple, He was still all-knowing. When He was physically present in a particular place, He was still omnipresent. When He was tried before Pilate, He was still all-powerful. Jesus had simply made a choice not to take hold of what was always—and will always be His—the attributes of being very God of very God.

Steven Smith gave an example that may help us with this: Imagine that you are visiting a hospital. You can't find a parking place close to the hospital, so you park way in the back, and

⁵ See also Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26, 14:62; Revelation 1:7.

then you become lost. You stop another driver to ask directions, and he kindly says that he will just park beside you and walk with you to where you need to be in the hospital.

Now suppose that as you get to the front of the hospital, you find out that this man is actually the chief surgeon of the hospital, and as you near the door, he adds, “Oh, yes, and this is my normal parking place.”

The surgeon had a superior position and many advantages because of his status. But out of concern for your needs, he chose not to take his rightful parking spot but walked with you the whole way. So here’s the question: As the Chief Surgeon was walking with you, did he stop being the Chief Surgeon? No, of course not. Did he still have a unique and privileged parking space? Yes, he did. He had all of these things and at any moment he could have used them, but for your sake he chose not to use them in that particular moment.

As limited as that metaphor is, it may help us see more clearly that Jesus’ walking among us as a human being never, ever meant that He was not still God. So why did Jesus not reverse His tiredness or be a Superhero without physical limitations? Jesus chose not to do these things because had He chosen to override his humanity, He would not have been fully and completely human, could not have “been tempted in every way, just as we are,” and would not have been able to save us by His fully-human-but-perfect life (Hebrews 4:15).

My friends, God’s Incarnation was not just an event at Bethlehem, but involved Jesus’ moment-by-moment choices to lay down His privileges, His rights as God, and to make himself subject to life as we live it, in order to secure our salvation.⁶

One more story, and we’re done. Linda Dupree was the only English teacher in a small rural school, and that meant that she taught her own three sons along the way. Each of them begged their mom not to call on them in class, not to use them as examples, and not to tell family stories, and she agreed to those requests.

Mrs. Dupree was a popular teacher, though, and other students really looked forward to being in her class. Noting this eagerness on the part of his friends to being in his mother’s class, Linda’s oldest son asked her, “Mama, do they know who you are?” And Linda, understanding that her son saw her only as a Mom, responded, “My son, do YOU know who I am?”⁷ That’s what was going on in the synagogue in Nazareth on that long-ago morning.

Author Philip Yancey noted that “As I travel, I’ve observed a pattern, a strange historical phenomenon of God’s action ‘moving’ geographically from the Middle East, to Europe to North America, and now to the developing world. **My theory is this: God goes where He’s wanted.**”⁸

My friends, we’ve seen Jesus rejected by the people of Gadara. We’ve seen Jesus rejected by the religious leaders of His day. We’ve seen Jesus rejected by the people who had known Him all of His life. We’ve seen Him ridiculed by his family. So the question for us today is this: **Is Jesus welcome here?**

*Is Jesus **really** welcome to be and to do what He chooses to do in this congregation?*

*Is Jesus **really** welcome to be and to do what He deems best in your life?*

And so what needs to happen NOW?

⁶ Steven Smith, *Dying to Preach* (Kregel, 2009), pp. 105-106.

⁷ Linda H. Dupree, Goldonna, Louisiana

⁸ Philip Yancey, cited in Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: 2002), p. 15.