

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Let me just start by asking this question. How many of you have been Christians for more than, say, 5 years? Raise your hand. A sizable majority. The reason I ask is this: There is a saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." And a saying doesn't become a saying unless there is a recognized truth in it. The more familiar you are with a person, the more likely you are to take them for granted, to under appreciate their talents and their view points, the more you come to simply expect things from them, and, ironically, when you're especially familiar with someone, you might misunderstand who they are. You may start to project your own understanding of the person onto them instead of thoughtfully considering that person and trying to understand them better.

If you've been a Christian more than 5 years, you have likely come to know Jesus Christ fairly well. And many of us here today have known Jesus our whole lives. You have become quite familiar with him. So, do you see the danger? Is it possible this familiarity could breed contempt? Is it possible that our response and our attitudes toward Jesus and his work and his love gradually shift over the years? I think the danger is real. It's my prayer that through today's message we will become more aware of this danger, and that our relationship with Christ may be something that is not "familiar" but new and exciting every day of your life.

The text before us today to help us do this is the Gospel lesson for this weekend: Luke 4:20-32. This is a continuation of the text we heard last week. Let me quick remind you of the setting. It's near the beginning of Jesus' preaching and teaching ministry. Jesus returns to Nazareth, his home town. These people know Jesus well... they've known him from birth! The Sabbath day rolls around, and Jesus does what he always does. He goes to the synagogue. Jesus was going to be the guest preacher that day. He was handed the scroll of Isaiah. And he reads the prophecy about one who would proclaim good news and heal and give freedom. Now we pick up this week's text:

"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, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 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. 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.'" "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 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. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 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." All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 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. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority."

Last week we focused on Jesus' message that he is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He is the promised Messiah and the Savior of the world. He is our *personal* Savior who removes our sin and guilt. Today, we read what happened afterwards. We see the response of the people to Jesus' message, and use this as opportunity to reevaluate our response to Jesus.

At first, the response of the people seems favorable, doesn't it? **"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips."** Isn't that great? Isn't that the response we would hope for when a person hears Jesus preach? Well, from what follows, we see what was really in their hearts when they said this. Truth is, their acclamation of Jesus was not because they were cut to the heart by their sins, and Jesus' message gave them the reassurance of their forgiveness. The words of praise were simply an acknowledgement that Jesus was very good at what he did. "Look, our home town boy has gone and made a name for himself! He's really got a way of speaking, doesn't he? That boy's got a golden tongue." So they weren't praising Jesus as the Savior of the world. They were praising Jesus as a good orator and a man who said kind things. Such praise does not come from a heart of faith.

We see similar praise of Jesus today. Once I was chatting with an avowed atheist through the internet. That atheist said, "I have nothing against Jesus. In fact, I try to follow Jesus' way of life in my life. I think he has some great thoughts on being kind to others and showing love. I think he was a great person. Of course, I think it's a bunch of baloney that his followers started worshipping him and saying he was true God. How absurd to say his death somehow removes sin and guilt, or to say he is the Savior of the world. He's certainly not *my* Savior. Jesus was a nice guy, a good philosopher and a great teacher." Words of praise for Jesus... from an atheist. But words that certainly didn't come from a heart of faith... just as those words of praise for Jesus from the people in his home town.

Jesus quotes Isaiah to point out this common sin, **"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."** (Matthew 15:8-9.) Have you ever been guilty of this?

- Have you ever read the confession of sins on Sunday morning without even a twinge of sadness entering your heart? How can we not be grieved by our many offenses against God? That's an example of lip service that doesn't come from the heart.
- Would you readily say "I trust in Jesus." Yet frequent prayers which prove we rely on him always and for all things are rare. Lips but no heart.
- Do you say, "I love Jesus!" But your life is filled with sin and disobedience that hurts Jesus deeply? Lips, but no heart.
- Do you say, "God's Word is true and life-changing!" But you don't listen to it more than once a week on the weekend? Lips but no heart.

Friends, we are in grave danger when we praise Jesus with just our lips but without our heart. To highlight the danger we are in, consider what happened next in this story and how quickly the scene changed.

The crowd showed the lack of faith in their hearts when they said, **"Isn't this Joseph's son?"** What they were saying is, "He's not anything special. We've known him since he was little! Kid's got talent, but the long promised Messiah?! The our Savior? The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? No way! I'd trust him frame my door. I'd hire him to make me a new kitchen table. But trust my eternal future to him? You've got to be kidding!"

Jesus loves them too much to ignore their unbelief. He could have quietly gone on his way, but he wants them to know that he knows they don't believe in him. **"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.’” “I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.” If they were going to see their need for him as their Savior, he would have to call them out on this sin. And he’s very blunt, isn’t he? He even brings in two illustrations from Israel’s history. When God’s own people Israel did not believe in him, he took his word to others. First, he reminds them of the story we heard in our Old Testament lesson. During Elijah’s time there was a long famine. It was a judgment from God on Israel for rejecting him and worshipping false gods. To provide for Elijah, God’s prophet, God sent him outside of Israel. He went to the north west, along the Mediterranean Sea, to Zarephath. There he stayed in the home of a non-Jewish widow and she was blessed with both God’s Word and God’s provision as he provided enough food for each day.

His second illustration. During the days of the prophet Elisha, there was also a lack of faith in God among the people of Israel. But a Gentile commander came to God’s prophet for healing... and he was healed. Not because there was a lack of Jewish people with leprosy... there were many. But because the people of Israel would not trust to God or turn to him in their need.

Have you ever acted in a similar way? Do we sometimes not rely on God day to day? Do we trust in ourselves, in the almighty dollar, in people... but not trust in God? We have sinned.

Now things really get ugly. Jesus pointed out their sin very bluntly. He hoped they would repent and turn to him for help and forgiveness. They did no such thing. Instead, our text says, **“All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 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.”** When Jesus loved them enough to point out sin to lead them to repentance, they reacted violently. They were furious. The mob herded Jesus out of town to edge of a cliff, ready to throw him to his death.

Have you ever caught yourself being getting defensive when you were called out on a sin? You clearly did wrong, but instead of repenting or apologizing, you got angry... maybe even violently angry? Have you been there and done that?

Our story concludes like this: **“But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.”**

Where Christ is rejected, his Word moves on to others who will hear and believe. Martin Luther said that God’s word is like a local thunder shower. It pours down in one place for a while, and then moves on if it is rejected. When Jesus was rejected by the people of Nazareth, he made his home base Capernaum along the north shore of the sea of Galilee. There the people heard his word *and* believed it. And they were drenched for a good long time in God’s Word and in his grace.

Familiarity breeds contempt. What is your response to Jesus and his teaching? Might we do well to give serious thought to this? Friends, I think we’ve seen the danger of what could happen in our lives if we become so familiar with Jesus that we do what the people of Nazareth did. Is our full trust in him? Do we think we know him well enough? Do we project our own understanding on who he is instead of listening carefully to his Word and invitation to believe. Do we take him and his blessings for granted? Or as time goes on, we see less and less need for his blessings... we’re doing just fine without him.

We’ve put ourselves in a very dangerous situation. May God lead us this day to acknowledge our sin and to repent. I firmly believe that the greatest danger to our souls is not ignorance about Jesus. We *know* don’t we? Rather our greatest danger is arrogance when it comes

to Jesus, and taking him for granted. This day, let us each as individuals and collectively as a congregation, bring these sins that arise from familiarity with Jesus to the foot of his cross. With hearts of faith, we expose ourselves to God, hiding nothing. His word has convicted us. We repent.

Now, take a fresh look at Jesus Christ. Imagine for the first time you are hearing about who he is and the work he has done. He is true God and true man. He lived a holy and perfect life in obedience to the Father... and he gives you the full credit for that holy life. He willingly walked the path that led to unimaginable suffering, and death by crucifixion... because that was the punishment a righteous God demanded for your mountain of sin. As he prepared to breath his last, he called out, "It is finished!" The debt was paid. Your sin atoned for. On the third day, Jesus' still, dead body began to breathe again. He rose, triumphant, glorified. He was victorious. And in him, you are too!

A familiar story? Absolutely. Must it breed contempt for Jesus? Absolutely not! This story need not be stale and old. It creates new hearts and new lives. It refreshes and gives strength. It builds faith and unfettered hope. It gives new peace and constant joy. May God always protect us against the temptation of giving lip service to him instead of heart service. May this good news about Jesus rain down upon us in a downpour all the days of our lives. And may this empower us to love him more and more and serve him eagerly with all our heart, soul, strength and mind all of our days. Amen.

"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" [Philippians 4:7] Amen.