

“Nazareth – Home Difficult Home

Theme: Journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem

Sermon Scripture: Mark 6: 1-6

Family Activity for the Week: Prepare to watch a family movie featuring superheroes (*Star Wars*, *Lego Batman* and *the Incredibles 2* would be good choices!). Before you view the movie, invite your kids to watch for ways different characters use their power. As you view the movie, serve a fun snack and enjoy! Following the movie, ask your kids one or more of the following questions: “Who was good/evil in the movie?” “Why do you say that?” “What were some choices the characters had to make regarding how they would use their power?” “What do you imagine you would have done when...?” Let your child know that though we may not have the powers of a superhero, we have God’s power within us which is even greater. Talk about how God wants us to use his power for good in the world. Pray and ask for God’s help.

Monday, March 25 – Read Mark 5:35-6:6. Mark had already documented that Jesus’ ministry met hostility from the religious authorities (see Mark 2:6, 24; 3:6, 22). With his daughter deathly ill, Jairus (“one of the synagogue leaders”) laid aside any objections he might have had to Jesus. When messengers came saying the girl had died, Jesus encouraged Jairus, saying, “Don’t be afraid; just keep trusting.” He repaid the synagogue leader’s trust by giving him back his daughter. Then he went to Nazareth, his home town, where familiarity apparently bred contempt and disbelief.

- When Jesus said the girl was “only sleeping” (Mark 5:39), he did not mean she hadn’t died. People then as now could tell death from unconsciousness. They didn’t ask for professional mourners if a person was still breathing. But with Jesus there, the girl’s time in death would be no longer than a sleep (see also John 11:11-14). How is Jesus’ power over even death a source of hope and confidence for you as you face life with all its uncertainties?
- In Nazareth, Jesus met rejection and anger. (Luke wrote that Jesus defined his mission by claiming God was fulfilling the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 through him—cf. Luke 4:16-21.) In what ways did “Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t he Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon?” express doubt about Jesus’ messianic claim? Why would Jesus’ work to address physical and spiritual bondage, poverty and blindness “repulse” his home town?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you were (and are) so much more than just “the Nazareth carpenter.” Help me to find and value time with you. Nourish my spirit and fill me with your resilience. Amen.*

Tuesday, March 26 – Read Luke 2:41-52. Long before the cross, Jesus’ mother Mary lived through a time of deep distress. During the three days of searching Luke reported, she surely must have feared that something bad had happened to Jesus. This story (the only one we have from Jesus’ boyhood) gave a glimpse of Jesus’ maturing process. Already he realized that the Temple, even more than Mary and Joseph’s home, was his Father’s house. And yet verse 51 also said he returned to Nazareth with his earthly parents and “was obedient to them.”

- It’s clear that Jesus’ parents didn’t just make a beeline for the Temple. Luke said they were shocked when they found Jesus there. What might Jesus’ precocious fascination with the Temple teachers have said about him? When he began to preach publicly, he said, “Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). How much of an appetite do you usually have for God? How can you maintain and increase that inner hunger and thirst?
- Jesus’ parents lost Jesus for a day—and spent three days finding him. Luke didn’t write anything about what that experience felt like to Jesus. Have you ever made a mistake with a child, or did your parents ever make a serious mistake with you? If so, have you as a parent or child been able, like Jesus and Mary, to move on with your relationship without letting the mistake(s) haunt and poison the relationship?

Prayer: *Loving Lord, I can only imagine the inner sense of recognition, of belonging, you must have experienced on that first visit to the Temple. In the light of your love, help me to feel more and more “at home” when I am in your presence. Amen.*

Wednesday, March 27 – Read Jeremiah 23:1-6. By Jeremiah’s day, David’s kingdom was no more. The leaders had failed. The Assyrian Empire destroyed the breakaway northern tribes. The southern

kingdom, Jeremiah's home, would soon be overrun by Babylon's army. The prophet said God would raise up "a branch" (a descendant) of David. One view holds that "Nazareth" is derived from one of the Hebrew words for "branch", namely "netzer", and alludes to the prophetic, messianic words in Book of Isaiah 11:1, "from (Jesse's) roots a Branch (netzer) will bear fruit." He would be a Savior, a good shepherd to God's scattered people.

- Focus on the actions and qualities the prophet described in verses 5-6. In what ways do you believe Jesus fulfilled these words in the course of his earthly life? Are there parts of this passage that you see as awaiting fulfillment in the future, when God's reign is fully established over the earth?
- Verses 1-2 remind us that God cares deeply how we use our influence (whether over one person or thousands). What do you do, in whatever sphere you have influence, to be a "shepherd" who builds people up, rather than destroying and scattering them? How do you want God to help you grow so you can be the kind of shepherd God blesses?

Prayer: *Loving Lord, like your people of old, you came out of Egypt, thanks to your vigilant, obedient parents. Help me know how to mix wisdom and compassion in welcoming strangers in your name. Amen.*

Thursday, March 28 – Read Daniel 8:15-18, 9:20-23. King Herod was a complex, disturbing man. He was called "the Great" because of his huge building projects, many of which still stand today. He yearned for his Jewish subjects to love him. But he was paranoid and vicious. He had killed three of his own sons, afraid they might take his throne. His violent rage at the birth of another King foreshadowed the rage of the religious leaders that would send Jesus to the cross.

- Even at his birth, Jesus was in danger. Later, in Luke 20:9-19, he told a story of vineyard tenants who killed the owner's son, wanting to claim the vineyard as their own. Jesus knew what faced him and chose the dangerous mission of salvation anyway. In what ways does that deepen your gratitude for the love that risked all to save you?
- Herod didn't know which child the wise men found, so he sent troops to kill all boys two and under in Bethlehem and "all the surrounding territory." But he missed Jesus, who would grow up to set up a new kind of kingdom where self-sacrificing love replaced brute force. How is Jesus' love setting you free, day-to-day, from the dark side of human power structures?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you knew even before your birth that this broken world is often a dangerous place. Make me one of your instruments to work however I can to protect your children when they find themselves in danger. Amen.*

Friday, March 29 – Read Isaiah 9:2-7. "To us," said Isaiah's prophecy, "a child is born, to us a son is given." His words had echoed through the centuries. "Wonderful counselor, mighty God, He will reign on David's throne, forever." Imagine Mary's feelings as it dawned on her that the "us" in that famous prophecy now meant her. She was the one who would bear the long-promised child.

- "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." Yet even after meeting Jesus, Paul would write, "Now we see a dim reflection" (1 Corinthians 13:12). In what ways has Jesus already lit up your dark world? In what ways are you waiting for the full glory of God's light?
- We sometimes miss verse 5 of Isaiah's message: "Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning." The child to be born, he said, would be called "Prince of Peace." How can you more fully follow the Prince of Peace, and resolve conflicts in his way, in your day-to-day dealings with others?

Prayer: *Loving Lord, you call me to mature, as you matured. You call me to obey, as you obeyed. Empower me to live into these callings each day. Amen*

Saturday, March 30 – Read Isaiah 42:1-4. Isaiah said God's servant would do big things in quiet ways that might at first seem small to us. After Jesus grew up, his home town's reputation led Nathanael to ask, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46). Yet in that tiny town, God found a teenager with no husband and no social status. Through her, God entered decisively into human history. God didn't "shout"—but Jesus quietly changed the world in big, big ways.

- "He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Does the way God goes about changing our broken world ever feel too slow or weak to you? Do you wonder at times why God doesn't simply write the divine laws in the clouds, or send a plague to wipe out all human traffickers or predatory loan sharks? In what quiet, loving, and effective ways can you join in God' movement to transform our world for the better?

Prayer: *O God, thank you for Nazareth and home, wherever we might find that. Help Jesus to be our home when life feels overwhelming, listening to his quiet and loving voice. Amen.*