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Title: Hometown Hero?

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Scripture: [1 Kings 17:7-16](#)

Text: [Luke 4:14, 21-30](#)

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Here we are on Super Bowl Sunday, a day that more than half the country thinks should be declared a national holiday. No one really thought that our Colts had a chance even though their end of season flourish showed enough promise for us to be disappointed. But of course, not as disappointed at the Saints fans.

According to statisticians, 24% of you will attend a party and roughly 103 million will watch the game. At least that was the number that watched it last year. The previous year was 114 million. Advertisers are hoping for a bump this year. There is a reason. The cost for a super bowl ads continue to rise, now 5.24 million for a 30 second spot. CBS is planning on taking in something just shy of one-half billion dollars.¹

Something new is going on with those Super Bowl ads. Despite the fact that research shows that they aren't very effective—80% of us say the Super Bowl commercial don't change our opinion and 10% of us only remember them—despite expense and effectiveness, or maybe because of expense and effectiveness, they are starting to be leaked early. You used to have to wait and be surprised during the Super Bowl. Now a number of the ads can be watched early. Word is out on the commercials.

The same can be said about Jesus. Word is out about Jesus. It doesn't take long. Jesus is coming off his wilderness experience where he is tempted by the devil. Immediately following, Luke says that "Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone." (Luke 4:14-15) According to all four gospels, his fame wasn't just from his teaching. It included healing, a whole day and night of miracles in Capernaum. News about his celebrity makes its way to Nazareth and then, word of his homecoming. Not only will he be back in

Nazareth, but he will also be with them on the Sabbath, the guest speaker in their synagogue.

I'm sure the service was packed, eager to hear what Jesus had to say. The first words were from the prophet Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." Of course, the Spirit of the Lord is upon him. It doesn't take a genius to see that Jesus has it all. Charisma, power, intelligence--SPIRIT—the whole package and the package was from Nazareth. I bet they already had a committee ready to change the sign at the city limits. "Welcome to Nazareth. Hometown of Jesus."

I don't think I'm stretching the text, reading too much into it. After all, you can go to Fairmount, Indiana and find a sign, Hometown of James Dean. He left them and made good. But they always wanted him to come back, stay. He's dead and gone and they still have the sign up. Columbus posted a sign about Mike Pence, three days before his inauguration. Hometown of Vice-president Mike Pence. Hometown signs are all over the place. There might even be a sign outside of San Mateo, California, Hometown of Tom Brady. Maybe not given the "Forty-Niners." Nazareth, Hometown of Jesus. He's their hometown hero.

Everything feels right. The hometown hero opens a scroll and reads the servant song of Isaiah 61. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... I'm going to bring good news to the poor; help the blind see, the oppressed go free and proclaim the year of the Lord. Then, Jesus drops the mic. It doesn't say it that way but that's what happens. "He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him." (Luke 4:20) A total mic drop. I'm sure everyone was like, "Wait. What just happened?"² They were staring at Jesus and he was staring back.

I wonder what he saw. Maybe he saw the committee get up with a hammer and sign in hand, heading out to the city limits. Maybe he saw them whispering. Luke says they were talking in church. Some of you do that. "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth." (Luke 4:22) Of course, they did. They remembered him as a little boy and loved the fact that he was now so articulate. Maybe somebody leaned over and said, loud enough for Jesus to hear, "John, this kid can preach. You make sure that the search committee seals the deal with him. We've got a keeper."

Local pride can be blinding. In this case, it causes them to misunderstand Jesus' calling. God didn't send him to be the Savior of Nazareth. God has a plan for Jesus, a mission that is far bigger than being the rabbi of a small town.

So watching them watching him, Jesus breaks the silence after his mic drop. "Doubtless you will quote to me the proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' " (Luke 4:23) In other words, the home folks are insinuating that they want some home cooking. "Jesus, you're an amazing healer in those other towns. How about bringing it home to Nazareth where it belongs, where you belong. You've healed others; now heal your own people. Settle down and settle in. Do here in your hometown the things we have heard you did at Capernaum. Be our hometown hero." The congregation wants to tie him down, domesticate him, and make him their own personal Savior.

But you can't make Jesus your own personal Savior. God didn't send Jesus for one; God sent Him for all, for all of the people in the world. So Jesus looked at his hometown congregation and said, "You want me to do miracles as I did in Capernaum. No way! I am not here to make you famous. I am like that great Old Testament man of God, Elijah. He was the greatest of all our prophets. And there was a famine in the land of Israel for three years and six months. Crops withered. The soil cracked. Not a drop of rain for years. And there were a lot of widows in the land of Israel in the time of Elijah. But remember where he went? God sent Elijah to a Gentile woman in Sidon, to a Gentile."

"Or Elisha," Jesus said. "Remember Elisha? He followed Elijah, and whatever spirit Elijah had, well, Elisha was given a double share of it. He was a powerful man. And in his time, there were many people with leprosy in the land of Israel. They were sick and covered with sores. But Elisha didn't heal any of them. Instead, he was sent to Na'aman, a Gentile army commander in Syria. And he healed the Gentile; he didn't heal any of the Jews."³

When the people of Nazareth heard this, they were absolutely furious. It suddenly struck them what Jesus was really saying. He was declaring the disturbing news that God loves everybody, particularly those beyond their tight, exclusive circle in that little synagogue in Nazareth. God even loves those people, the Gentiles.

There is nothing more difficult in life as a wonderful situation turning sour. We've all had that experience. There is nothing more painful than feeling rejected. We've all had that experience. There is nothing more painful than to learn that the one you admire holds a very different position than yours. All three emotions and feelings are there. Suddenly, the hometown hero becomes the outcast and there is an explosion of anger "... all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and

went on his way.” (Luke 4:28-30) It’s not really a happy ending but it could have been worse. At least Jesus passed through them unharmed.

I like to believe that every story in the Bible is given to us for a purpose. Don’t you? Surely this isn’t here just to tell us why Jesus didn’t hang out in Nazareth. Maybe just maybe, we ought to put ourselves in the story, hear the silence when the mic drops and then hear what Jesus says in the second half of the sermon.

Admit it. We like choosing who is going to be saved and who isn’t, who is in and who is out, who will be in this church and who can go to the Devil. We can be as judgmental as the next guy. Anybody want to make a list of those people we don’t want to have around here? And we know those people, whoever is on your list, aren’t worthy of a relationship with Jesus. He’s our personal savior. You’ve got to admit; a personal Messiah for Geist Christian Church has lots of curb appeal. I’d like to keep Jesus around here, just for us. Just think of the sign. Geist Christian Church, the home church of Jesus. All kinds of people would show up. Oh, but that could be a problem, couldn’t it?

One of the most challenging things that you can do is to take every story in the Bible seriously, not as a comforting word but as a challenging word, not just as a nice story but as a truth that is speaking to you. There is a challenge in this story and it might just come down to God’s love for all, not a few.

The great preacher and storyteller Fred Craddock had one about this, a story about the little church that he served when he was just starting out. It was in the eastern Tennessee hills, not too far from Oak Ridge. It was an old, historic church, over a hundred years old, a lovely little white frame church filled every Sunday with very friendly folks.

Just as Craddock arrived, Oak Ridge exploded with a big government construction project around atomic energy. The tiny town became a booming city overnight. Craddock’s little church wasn’t far away.

After he’d been there a few weeks, Craddock asked the old-timers why no one came to the church from the big government project, the people who lived in trailers and hastily built houses. There were so many children! So Fred called the leaders of the congregation together: “We need to reach out in Christian love to the new folks who are here. They are our neighbors. God has placed a great new mission field in our own backyard! What a grand opportunity for us to be the church.” The chairman of the board stood up and said, “Oh, I don’t think so. Those people just wouldn’t fit in here” “But,”

Fred argued with him, "these folks live right in our backyard. They need the church. We need to share the gospel with them." They argued about it, time ran out, and the board chair said they'd vote on it next Sunday.

Next Sunday, they all sat down after the worship service. "I move," said one of them, "I move that in order to be a member of this church, you must own property in the county." Someone else said, "I second that" The vote was unanimous, except for Fred, who was quickly reminded he couldn't vote.

Years later, Fred had the opportunity to go back to this part of Tennessee. Like most church people, he immediately went to see his old church. It was still pretty, pristinely sitting on a hillside. He was somewhat surprised to see the parking lot filled with cars in the middle of the week. Mostly pickup trucks, motorcycles, and smaller inexpensive cars. He looked closer at a new sign that hung on the church building. The sign said, "Barbecue chicken, Ribs, Pork" It was not a church anymore. The church had died out. The restaurant that took its place was filled – with people eating barbeque. Fred turned to his wife and said, "Nettie, it's a good thing this isn't a church anymore. These folks who drive those cars would never have been welcomed there." ⁴

That would never happen here, would it? No. When it comes to our church, all are welcome. We have a heart for God and a heart for people, right? But if we are honest, there is a little Nazareth in us, a little Oak Ridge. At the very least, we know God's reach is a lot wider than ours.

Jesus pauses, drops the mic and then, declares the startling news that God loves everybody. It was so challenging to them that they responded by running Jesus off. Here is the truth. This story is in our Bibles, which means the challenge is there for us too. So this is what I want you to do. Take a moment and think about your life.

Who is it that you are uncomfortable with?

Who is it that you shy away from at church?

Who is it in your daily life, your weekday world that you don't like because they don't look like you, act like you, think like you, believe like you?

Who is it that just seeing them can make the hair stand up on the back of your neck?

God sent Jesus to them too. In light of that truth, how might you respond to them? It ought to give you pause, a big pause, like Jesus just dropped a mic.

¹ <https://wallethub.com/blog/super-bowl-facts/1589/>

² Weber, N. "If Jesus was your preacher." Retrieved @ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2016/01/if-jesus-was-your-preacher-a-sermon/>

³ Carter, W. "When the Sermon turns Sour" retrieved by subscription@ <https://sermons.com/sermon/when-the-sermon-turns-sour/1345906>

⁴ Fred B. Craddock; Mike Graves; Richard F. Ward. Craddock Stories (Kindle Locations 381-384). Kindle Edition.