

“Homeward Bound”

from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL

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Mark 6:1-13

Matt Matthews

Few songs are filled with more longing than Paul Simon’s “Homeward Bound,” which tells the story of a singer-songwriter going from town to town to town to sing her songs. I’m sitting in the railway station.

*Got a ticket to my destination.
On a tour of one-night stands my suitcase and guitar in hand.
And every stop is neatly planned for a poet and a one-man band.*

But it’s not the road for which our hero longs. She longs for home.

*Homeward bound,
I wish I was,
Homeward bound,
Home where my thought’s escaping,
Home where my music’s playing,
Home where my love lies waiting
Silently for me.*

Thank God for home. Thank God for the home fires that warm us on winter nights. Thank God for the home that provides respite in summer shade.

My hometown is Hampton, Virginia. When my parents and I traveled, Dad would drive the few extra blocks to the waterfront. He’d look at that water and say, “The best part of going away is coming back home.”

Rachel’s spiritual hometown is Montreat, North Carolina. Our friends Donna and Scott Paul-Bonham call Michigan home, and they speak fondly, longingly of their hometowns of Holland and St. Joe. The Great Lake. Fricano’s Pizza. The hot summers with fruit trees in bloom. Cross country skiing.

Some in our world—an increasingly large number—are refugees on the run. They find shelter in tent cities, but that’s not home. No, they remember homes back in their native land in more peaceful seasons, or they dream of some future home where things are safe and nights are quiet.

Jesus—who began his life as a political refugee on the run into Egypt—had a home in Nazareth. Nazareth is 25 dusty miles from Bethlehem where he was born; ninety-three miles on modern roads to Jerusalem where he died; twenty-nine miles to the coast of the Dead Sea at Capernaum where he healed the centurion’s servant; some thirty miles to the River Jordan where he was baptized and his ministry began.

Jesus had a home in Nazareth.

While Jesus had a home, we know him from the gospels as a man often on the go. He probably had neither suitcase nor guitar in hand, but he carried the very little he needed—from town to town to town.

One wonders if Jesus ever missed home; if he daydreamed about his dad’s laughter or his mom’s home-cooking. One wonders if he rejoiced on those occasions when he found himself to be homeward bound.

If he ever did get homesick, how heartrending this passage is. We find Jesus at home, teaching in the synagogue. People are astounded. "Where did this man get all this?" they asked. "Who gave him this wisdom? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"

And then Mark lets us in on this shattering observation: And they took offense at him.

Maybe the home-towners thought Jesus had grown too big for his britches. Like the daughter who goes off to the university in the big city and comes home some years later; her outlook has changed. Her experiences have transformed her. She's quoting poetry now; she's saying grown-up things. She understands commerce, and interest rates, and politics. She has a mind of her own. She comes home from college and she's the same girl, but she's not the same girl. She's a woman with thoughts and ideas of her own. She was a quaint, little child, the daughter of so-and-so. Now, she's a woman with a voice of her own. She doesn't cling to her mother's dress anymore but stands alone on her own two feet.

Maybe that's what's going on here in this passage. Jesus comes home and he's no longer the boy he once was, but a man now. And he has opinions. He has opinions and ideas that, obviously, run counter to the opinions of the adults in his hometown. Jesus is rocking the status quo and the home crowd doesn't like it. They took offense at him.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus got the hometown people so riled up with his preaching, they ran him out of town altogether; drove him to the brow of a hill to throw him off, but, miraculously, he escaped.

How wonderful it is to have a hometown to come back home to. But how painful it is to realize you don't have a home in your hometown anymore. Jesus would say in both Luke and Matthew's gospel (Luke 9:58) "Foxes have dens and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

And he says here in Mark's gospel, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown." [\[1\]](#)

In the next scene in Mark's gospel, while Jesus is still "amazed" at his elders' unbelief, he sets out again from town to town to town. And he commissions his disciples to do the same, to go out two by two. Travel lightly. Carry your staff. Bring no suitcase, no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Tighten your sandals. Bring my greetings to the world. Share God's love with every town, with every home, with every person, with every cop, with every beggar, with every waitress, with every grocery bagger and bank teller and floor tiler and ticket taker—with everybody.

* * *

This passage reminds us that Jesus' home was bigger than his hometown. And while it sickens us that the elders in Nazareth rejected him, the gospel required him to take to the road. Places like Jericho and Capernaum and Jerusalem and Champaign/Urbana awaited him, needed him, were starving for his good news.

We are called, if it is possible, to enjoy our house and our hometown. But our house is meant to be a place of hospitable welcome people in, not to keep them out. Our fences are meant to have gates so we can visit our neighbors. Our provincial, small-minded ideas of "home" are meant to grow up to include the whole wide world.

This is the way John Bell in Scotland's Iona Community puts it:

*Light looked down and saw darkness.
"I will go there," said Light.
Peace looked down and saw war.
"I will go there," said Peace.
Love looked down and saw hatred.*

*"I will go there," said Love.
So he, The Lord of Light,
the Prince of Peace,
the King of Love,
came down
and crept in beside us.*

* * *

Home is a good thing. Don't get too used to just one place, though, and only to a few close relations. Jesus sends us out to the darkness, to the war, to the hatred, to all the broken places. Jesus points us to the stranger in the strange town and says, *Go there. Bring them my peace and light and love. Get to know them. Find ways to bring them my joy. Jesus urges us, Love the stranger, the alien, the wayward traveler. Get to know them. Get to know them and invite them home to me. Invite me into their heart, into their way of life, into their worship, into their home.*

In this way—if we are open to and following God's call, walking with courage and hope down the roads to which Christ leads—may we always all be homeward bound.

AMEN

O Trinity of love and power,
Guard all travelers in danger's hour.
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect these travelers wherever they go.
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee
Glad praise from air and land and sea.

*Eternal Father, Strong to Save
The Navy Hymn
William Whiting, 1860*

Mark 6:1-13

1He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. 4Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." 5And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." 12So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

[\[1\]](#)

We find Jesus coming to his hometown to share the gospel. For whatever reasons, he is rejected by his own people. But the gospel isn't just for our own hometown; it's for the world. And our "home" is much, much bigger than our "hometown."