

***CRIBB<S>NOTE - July 5, 2009***

As Christians, we may have a hard time understanding how Jesus was rejected in his hometown of Nazareth when he returned to read Scripture in the temple. We may think it harsh and unreasonable that those who knew him best, including his family and kin, would not accept the power of his ministry. Yet, Jesus' experience is so common there is a cliché used to describe it: "familiarity breeds contempt."

It is quite possible that when we know someone so very well, it is hard to accept him or her for who s/he has become. There is another saying that applies to such situations, "You can never go home again."

There is another aspect to the scenario that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to receive a long-time acquaintance or family member back into the fold after s/he has achieved great success. Self-hatred or denial of one's own capacity to do incredible feats can create contempt for 'that one' who excels to the heights of realized potential. In the hearts and minds of persons who refuse to stretch themselves beyond that which is comfortable, easy, and familiar find it very hard to celebrate authentically the return of one who reflects the full ability given by God.

When Jesus went home, no doubt those who knew him best were glad to have him among them. There were probably some who wanted to touch and ride his coat tails so some of his fame and glory would rub off on them. They wanted to parade him among their friends and claim kinship to him. There may have been those who took great pride in the fact that they knew him, grew up with him, and had inside information about his life. Jesus' popularity raced home ahead of him and people were waiting to see what he was like. But, "familiarity breeds contempt."

Jesus did not bring home packages of souvenirs and wild stories about life in the big city. He did not present himself as a pop culture superstar who was addicted to groupies and fans. He did not demonstrate a need for constant attention, paparazzi, and media interviews. Instead, Jesus performed the traditional reading of the Scriptures like so many other men had done for centuries in their backwater village of Nazareth.

His return did not signal an automatic performance of miracles and grand stand sermons. He came home with wisdom and power that was uncommon even among the scholars, religious leaders, and wise ones in the village. Those who knew him best were well aware of his roots and family ties. They knew his momma and his daddy. He was a wood carver from an ordinary family. There was nothing spectacular about his upbringing. To those who knew him best, Jesus was nobody special; not even with his reputation as a miracle worker.

No matter how hard he tried to deliver a message of hope, salvation, and liberation, there was nothing he could say or do to motivate the people of his hometown to believe the power of God's love.

We might think it was a shame an opportunity had been missed. We might believe it was awful Jesus left everything behind and went away from Nazareth to carry his message and miracles to other places where he was accepted by strangers.

It could be Jesus has come home again and what he has to say continues to go unheard and he remains rejected in his hometown. Contempt for self and arrogance toward others can block the message and the medium. How can we hear God's Word and take seriously Jesus' instruction to go out and spread the Good News? It may be easier to identify with those who knew him best rather than do what Jesus did and said.