

Introductory

“Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you back.” Frost

The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth may seem to be complicated, but it isn't. He was on two separate occasions rejected by the people of Nazareth. The synoptics all have accounts of rejections. This one comes early on in Jesus' Ministry, shortly after the Temptation, upon His return to Galilee, before going to Capernaum, and the one Matthew and Mark record came much later.

Luke tells us specifically that this happened at Nazareth, and that it ended with the people wanting to throw Him off a cliff in order to kill Him. Matthew talks about Jesus coming to “His own country,” where He taught “them” in “their” synagogue, and what he records sounds like the way the people of Nazareth would be expected to talk about Jesus, who had cut His teeth there.

Indeed, Jesus Himself talks like He's one of them. The rejection Mark records is very similar to Matthew's, and both of them follow it with the sending of the Twelve and the like, which Luke records (9: 1-6), which is an incident that came much later than this rejection account. Is it such a stretch to think that Jesus went twice to Nazareth, and was twice rejected by the people there?

None of those rejection accounts is appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. In the LW three-year lectionary, the arrival of Jesus at Nazareth – as related by Luke (4:14-21) – is appointed for Epiphany 3C, and the rejection – as related by Luke (21-32) – is appointed for Epiphany 4C. In LSB, those two readings are combined into this one on this Sunday.

I went to the Post Office before work on Monday, and that's when I remembered that it was King Day. I was on my way to work, and did not take the day off, but a lot of people did. There was a lot of coverage and remembrance in the media, more now than ever, and white people generally don't feel as strongly about the things MLK fought for, and that's the way we're built.

I guess we're talking about race again. The Culture is saying that me being born a white man makes me a racist, and if I deny being a racist, that proves that I am one. There is racism in this country, and it goes both ways, but it's not as bad here as it is in many countries, and we as a nation are very well aware that racism is bad. It's one more thing Christianity has taught America.

I really don't get the Lutheran disdain for MLK. Some of them want to call him a communist, and I'm not sure any adultery has ever been conclusively proven. We do know that Thomas Jefferson

famously fathered a child by Sally Hemmings, whom he owned. MLK was a Christian Pastor, and the Southern Christian Leadership Council led America's Christian Civil Rights Movement.

History offers an abundance of proof that the Natural Man is racist. Beginning with Jesus – actually, beginning in the OT, as Jesus here teaches – continuing with Paul and people like Luther, for the Christians race has never kept a person from participating in our religion. Modern racism begins with the Enlightenment, and we've been fighting with them tooth and nail for a long time.

I have talked about those things before, I will probably talk about it this Sunday, and I'm not sure if preachers who insist that they preach "Christ crucified" exclusively for twenty minutes every Sunday – maybe that's not their cup of tea. Actually, I preached for twenty-seven minutes two weeks ago, so my hearers missed the last seventeen because of their short attention span.

Actually, the last time I heard a Homiletics Professor from one of our seminaries talk about length of sermon, he said eight minutes – and I guess they teach how to preach a children's sermon at the Seminary these days. Check out this photo from the Presby (USA) church down the road. Note who is and is not paying attention to the children's sermon. Might as well preach it from the pulpit.



This is not Jesus' first trip to the rodeo. After the Temptation, Luke has Him returning to Galilee, where He became famous, "and He was teaching in their synagogues, being glorified by all" (4:15). The verb "teaching" is in the Imperfect tense, and it what that means is that at that point Jesus began going into their synagogues and that He habitually did that, habitually teaching.

Textual Notes

16. On the heels of The Wilderness Temptation, Luke tells us that Jesus returned to Galilee, He was being talked about in "all the surrounding country," that He taught in "their synagogues, being glorified by all, Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς Ναζαρά, οὗ ἦν τεθραμμένος – and He came into Nazareth, where He had been raised." He did not just wander into town, but very deliberately went to Nazareth.

The word used to describe His upbringing occurs only nine times in the NT, always in connection with being fed physical food. That verb is in the perfect tense; past action with results enduring to the present and into the future. People like to juxtapose a person's genetics and his environment and ask whether it's "Nature or Nurture" that makes a person who she is. It's both, of course.

The village of Nazareth had nurtured Jesus through childhood now into manhood, and they had shaped Him like every person is shaped by his hometown. I'm from Milan, IL, and that town has shaped me in ways of which I'm very aware, and I'm sure there are other ways of which I have nary a clue. Throw in parental and other influences, but here we're talking about the hometown.

Bengel thinks He came to Nazareth "for the purpose of repaying the debt of gratitude to the city where He had been reared to maturity," and I'm not sure what that means. I've never done that. Is the mere presence of this supposed favorite – becoming more famous all the time – son their reward? At any rate, it's familiar territory for Him, and He does what you do on that day.

As He had done many times before, "καὶ εἰσῆλθεν κατὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν – and He went – as was His custom – into the synagogue on the sabbath day." The word "custom" occurs only four times in the NT. It means things that one does because that's what one does; Pilate loosing a prisoner, Paul going into the synagogue and preaching (Acts 17:2).

Such is the case with many Christians and church attendance on Sunday morning. That's what they do on Sunday morning, and they don't do other things, ever. On vacation, including when we travel, on Sunday morning, we're going to be in church, and if we can't find an LCMS church, then we will go to a different – probably Catholic – church and not participate in the Sacrament.

There are no LCMS in places like Ireland and Italy, and we went to church in both places. In Galway, we went to church three times. The first service everybody talked fast, and we could not make out a word of what anybody was saying. The second one had a wonderful soprano soloist. The third – Galway Cathedral – the preacher was understandable and preached the Gospel.

In Florence – St. Martin, not the Duomo – the preacher was good – we didn't understand a word of it, and we were one of few there for the sermon. But as the time for Communion approached, the church started to fill, and they were there for the Sacrament, and when it was time for that people came in from outside to receive the Sacrament and then immediately returned to outside.

As they were coming in for it, we were going out because we are Lutherans. We did not commune at any of those churches. The Anglican at Stratford in 2005 preached the Gospel more clearly than a lot of Lutherans, and whether or not he believed in the Resurrection, he preached it, and we did not commune. Nor did we commune at St. Mary in Wittenberg a couple of years ago.

In Wittenberg, on Saturday evenings the Lutherans take turns doing at service at the Castle Church. When we went there, the organizer was a LCMS DP, and the preacher was ELCA, and what do you make of that? On the third Saturday evening of the month, the LCMS and SELK do a “confessional” service in a small room in a building in the old Wittenberg village.

You might even say that Jesus was in the “habit” of going to church every week, and some people would think that a bad reason to go, but it is not. We do all kinds of things out of force of habit, and if that thing is a good thing, then it's a good habit to have. If it's a bad habit, then that's what it is, and my parents both encouraged me to break those kinds of habits and nurture the good ones.

I'm thinking that what happened next may or may not have happened before when Jesus went to church; “καὶ ἀνέστη ἀναγνῶναι – and He stood up to read.” Meyer thinks it did. Like our church service, this was a part of the synagogue service, and Jesus would have been eligible to read the OT scripture, one from the Law and one from the Prophets. Ellicott says of this verse,

This, then, had been His wont before He entered on His work. Children were admitted to the synagogue at the age of five. At thirteen attendance was obligatory. It was open to any man of reputed knowledge and piety, with the sanction of the ruler of the synagogue, to read the lessons (one from the Law and one from the Prophets), and our Lord's previous life had doubtless gained the respect of that officer. Up to this time, it would seem, He had confined Himself to reading. Now He came to preach, after an absence possibly of some months, with the new power that had already made Him famous. The work of preaching also was open to any person of adequate culture, who had a “word of exhortation” to address to the worshippers. (Comp. Acts 13:15.) The constitution of the synagogue in thus

admitting the teaching functions of qualified laymen, was distinctly opposed to the root-idea of sacerdotalism.

Interesting take to have Jesus reading of the Scripture as a proof-text against sacerdotalism. Interesting because I was accused of being that at the last IDE Convention. The committee put forth the resolution that women should not be allowed to read the Scriptures. I opined why should we limit the prohibition to women, and that no laymen – including men - should do that.

The Pastor should read the Scriptures, and if he's on vacation and he can't find a pastor to fill in, then he needs to try harder. For that, a youngster who was very wet behind the ears – and wearing a clerical – cautioned against "sacerdotalism." I'm sure we were all impressed with his vocabulary word. I think I had been a Pastor for ten years before I got up at the mic at convention.

I will often tell my wife about things that I did not say, boasting in my new-found ability to keep my mouth shut. I boasted to her after the convention that I did not get up to the mic and propose that all LCMS women be required to at all times be barefoot and pregnant. I wanted to say that from the mic, but I didn't. That's okay. It would have been lost on them anyway.

The Israel trip is probably a year or two away, and when Sunday comes and we find ourselves in Israel, we'll find a church, and it won't be LCMS. The Protestants from Germany have a church or two there, but it's really in the Orthodox bailiwick. I've never been to one of their services, and maybe we'll hit a synagogue service on Friday or Saturday, like this guy habitually did.

Professor Hackett ("Illustrations of Scripture," p. 232) says:

"I attended the Jewish worship at Jerusalem, and was struck with the accordance of the ceremonies with those mentioned in the New Testament. The sacred roll was brought from the chest or closet where it was kept; it was handed by an attendant to the reader; a portion of it was rehearsed; the congregation rose and stood while it was read, whereas the speaker, as well as the others present, sat during the delivery of the address which formed a part of the service."

17 – 19. The reading that day was from Isaiah 61: 1-2, a Messianic text that proclaims the coming of the proclamation of the Gospel, and Jesus does that all the time, as did John before Him. Being the Messiah, He knows that Isaiah was talking about Him, and he was. Jesus is well-known and often quoted for preaching the Law, but the Gospel predominates in all His preaching and teaching.

The other things that Isaiah in the quotation says the Messiah will do, Jesus ends up doing as well. The proclamation of release to the captives is a nice, and in the Bible common metaphor used to proclaim the Gospel, He will give sight to the blind, and setting at liberty those who are oppressed sounds a lot like the metaphor just quoted. Bible scholars call that "Hebrew Parallelism."

20. When He was done reading, “πτύξας τὸ βιβλίον ἀποδοὺς τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ ἐκάθισεν – rolling up the scroll, he turned it back over to the attendant.” We read our readings from the Lectionary, which is in a book, and which stays on the lectern during the week. The Jews read from scrolls that are stored during the week and brought out with some ceremony to be read at synagogue.

WIK offers a nice summary,

The ark in a synagogue (also called the Torah ark or holy ark) is a receptacle, or ornamental closet, which contains each synagogue's Torah scrolls (Sifrei Torah in Hebrew),^[1] also known as Heikhal in some Jewish dialects.

These cabinets can be seen on the Internet, and often can be quite ornamental, reflecting their high regard for the Scriptures, a regard not shared by many Christians. I’m talking about how we have several Bibles just laying around like any other book, but I’m particularly talking about the alleged Bible scholars who twist and pervert the Word in a way that can only be called blasphemous. Knowing what was coming next, eagerly anticipating the sermon, “καὶ πάντων οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ ἦσαν ἀτενίζοντες αὐτῷ – all the eyes in the synagogue were fixed upon Him.” The word “fixed” or “fastened” is often applied to eyes in the NT, often it is applied to the mind, and the two things sort of go together, don’t they? Did these people have to be taught how to listen?

21. The introductory word of the sermon certainly gets out attention, “Σήμερον πεπλήρωται ἡ γραφὴ αὕτη ἐν τοῖς ὠσὶν ὑμῶν – today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The verb is in the perfect tense; the fulfilling has just happened in this case in the very near past, and the results of that will last into the present and into the future, and they do last even unto us now.

22. That is surely a short summary of a lengthier sermon. The response to His proclamation to be Messiah is that they don’t know quite what to make of it, “καὶ πάντες ἐμαρτύρουν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐθαύμαζον ἐπὶ τοῖς λόγοις τῆς χάριτος τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ - and all were bearing witness to Him and marveling at the blessed words that are coming out of His mouth.”

The KJV says “bare him witness,” which is correct. Most of the other translations have them speaking “well” of Jesus, and I’m not sure where they come up with that. It’s the basic verb for witnessing something, basically a legal term, sharing its root with “martyr,” and it means they saw what they saw, and heard what they heard with their senses. Sometimes LBT can be a good thing.

The word “marveling” can be either a positive or a negative thing. It means that they didn’t know quite what to make of His proclamation to be Messiah. They are gob smacked. To self, and then to each other “καὶ ἔλεγον Οὐχὶ υἱὸς ἐστὶν Ἰωσήφ οὗτος – and they said, ‘isn’t this Joseph’s son?’” The “Οὐχὶ” expects a positive answer; yes, of course this is Joseph’s Son. But of course, it’s not.

23. I hate it when people tell me what I’m thinking. Jesus tells them what they’re thinking. They are about to quote that one proverb “Ἰατρίε, θεράπευσον σεαυτόν – doctor, heal yourself.” That

idiom has come down to us in this form. Similar idioms were clearly known at the time of Jesus. Wikipedia talks about Aesop's Fable of the Frog and the Fox, and from the Fifth Century B.C.,

The Greek dramatist [Aeschylus](#) refers to one in his [Prometheus Bound](#), where the chorus comments to the suffering Prometheus, "Like an unskilled doctor, fallen ill, you lose heart and cannot discover by which remedies to cure your own disease."^[5]

Meyer sees the meaning of that saying as quoted to Jesus by them,

If thou desirest to be a helper of others ([Luke 4:18-19](#); [Luke 4:21](#)), first help thyself from the malady under which thou art suffering, from the want of consideration and esteem which attaches to thee; which healing of Himself, as they think, must be effected by means of miracle as a sign of divine attestation.

He continues to tell them what they are thinking, “ὅσα ἠκούσαμεν γενόμενα εἰς τὴν Καφαρναοὺμ, ποιήσον καὶ ὧδε ἐν τῇ πατρίδι σου – whatever we have heard have come into being in Capernaum, do also here in your hometown.” They are looking for a miracle. They want the man they think is the son of Joseph to prove to them that’s He’s something special by doing a miracle here.

Whether or not Jesus “in the power of the Spirit” includes Jesus doing miracles or not, apparently, obviously, Jesus has done miracles at Capernaum. Or so Nazareth has heard. As of yet, Luke has not recorded any specific miracles done at the hand of Jesus in that city or anywhere else, but he does record here that the people of Nazareth thought Jesus had, and what about us Jesus?

Luke the doctor includes this idiom, and the others don't, and the meaning of idiom often changes with time and culture. They are not saying here that Jesus is sick, either spiritually or in His body. What they are saying is apparently, obviously, there are sick people in Nazareth, and people who have other needs as well, and they want a piece of what they have heard Jesus can give them.

24. You have heard it said by the men of old that one becomes an expert in one's field when one gets a couple hundred miles away from home. There is some truth to it. Pastors don't (can't?) go to their home congregations. More to the point here, they watched Him grow up, they knew Him better than any group of people knew Him, and yet they still think of Jesus as Joseph's boy.

It was not unusual that the Prophets were rejected by the locals. Benson notes,

You will soon ask, why my love does not begin at home? why I do not work miracles here, rather than at Capernaum? It is because of your unbelief. Nor is it any new thing for a messenger of God to be despised in his own country. So were both Elijah and Elisha, and thereby driven to work miracles among heathen, rather than in Israel.

Excavations have turned up two synagogues in ancient Capernaum. When Luke tells us (14) that Jesus taught in synagogues, surely Capernaum – just down the road, home to several Apostles – was among the synagogues at which He did that. Nazareth's beef was about location, not ethnicity. Why can you do for the Jews over there, and not the Jews here. Jesus makes it about ethnicity.

At this point in the exchange during the church service, Jesus could have just pulled a miracle out of His messianic hat to show them that He is able to do that, and that He does care about them. He could have preached the Gospel to them, but first they have to be convicted by the Law, and so He proceeds to proclaim the Law in all its harshness. But they were not convicted by it.

25 - 26. Where He goes next is to note that there were plenty of widows in Israel at the time of the prophet Elijah, but God did not send him to any of them. Instead Elijah was sent “εἰ μὴ εἰς Ζάρεπτα τῆς Σιδωνίας – except into Zarephath, in Sidon,” to a widow there. Go ahead and review that true story for your hearers, found in 1 Kings 17. It's not Zarephath, NJ, but a place in Phoenicia.

It's over around the twin cities of Tyre and Sidon, a very non-Jewish and pro-pagan area, as we see from the Gospels and other sources. The widow helped by Elijah was most certainly a Gentile, but there it is, Elijah assisting a woman who was ethnically not one of theirs. Here, and in the next verse, Jesus is simply quoting from the OT, which relates an actual incident recorded there.

27. Likewise, there were plenty of lepers in Israel at the time of Elisha, but God did not send him to any of them, but “οὐδεὶς αὐτῶν ἐκαθαρίσθη εἰ μὴ Ναϊμᾶν ὁ Σύρος – none of them were cleansed, except Namaan the Syrian.” Here and in the previous verse, the exception clause “εἰ μὴ” is used. There is the norm, and then there is the exception to the rule – and usually it's only one.

28. It was His quoting of the Bible in answer to their unspoken question that got them riled up. “Hearing this,” Hearing Him point out that in at least two cases in the OT, God preferred to do miracles for the non-Israelite at the exclusion of Israelites “ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες θυμοῦ - they were filled with wrath.” This is not “righteous anger,” but more like they lost their collective temper.

Sometimes Jesus gets “ὀργή – angry” (Mark 3:5), and Paul commands the Christians at Ephesus to “ὀργίζεσθε – be angry,” (4:26) about the right things, but don't sin, and that's a different word. Here, the emotion felt by the people of Nazareth about Jesus is “θυμός.” Of that word here, Vine distinguishes it from the other one as meaning “an outburst of wrath from inward indignation.”

He continues “Orge is less sudden in its rise than thumos, but more lasting in its nature.” Peruse the eighteen occurrences of the word in the NT, and you will see that it's frowned upon and often used to describe the utter contempt a person feels when hearing the Word of God. Like what happened when Jesus preached a sermon about God helping out Gentiles and not people like them.

29. This entire exchange happens, Luke tells us, within the walls of the synagogue, not part of the liturgy. Then they threw Him out of the city, but that wasn't enough for them. They “ἤγαγον αὐτὸν ἕως ὄφρυος τοῦ ὄρους – led Him until the brow of the hill” their town had been built upon. The Internet calls it “Mount Precipice,” and you can see photos of it and all Nazareth on it.

The verb can mean that Jesus was led by them and followed to the spot, or it can mean that they herded Him to the spot, or that they physically forced Him to the spot. What is clear is that it wasn't His idea to go to that place to be shoved off of that cliff, but it is just as clear that He allowed Himself to be taken there, and He did not allow that so that they could shove Him and kill Him.

An Asian woman was killed in NYC last week in a manner similar to that. One witness says,

“He approaches her and he gets in her space. She gets very, very alarmed,” Assistant Chief Jason Wilcox said, describing the earlier encounter. “She tries to move away from him and he gets close to her, and she feels that he was about to physically push her onto the train. As she's walking away she witnesses the crime where he pushes our other victim in front of the train.”

30. He went there so that He could do this; “αὐτὸς δὲ διελθὼν διὰ μέσου αὐτῶν ἐπορεύετο – He passing through the middle of them went away,” showing them the miracle they had wanted. Don't we think they would have stopped His escape if they could have? The miracle is in the angry mob not being able to keep Him from just walking away, not running.

Nor did he put some moves on them like Barry Sanders used to moves on them, nor did He sneak away, but He goes “through the middle of them,” and that's the end of it, and He's gone, and the next verse has Him going to Capernaum, business as usual; He did miracles in Capernaum, and do you suppose the people of Nazareth wondered why He didn't do miracles for them.

Hymns

LSB 454 – Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle

LSB 681 – God of the Prophets

LSB 841 – O Son of God, in Galilee

LSB 849 – Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness

Anything from the Epiphany Section

Sermon Titles

Return of the Native

Going Home