

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B, 7.8.18

Ezekiel 2:2-5/2 Corinthians 12:7-10/Mark 6:1-6

JUST A CARPENTER...

YET OUR LORD AND SAVIOR

How many of you have gone or are planning a visit to your hometown this summer? I just got back from my annual visit to my hometown of Toledo, Ohio, back to my roots - and a visit with my two sisters, Pat and Carol. Pat is three years younger than me and Carol is six years older. We took a day trip last Sunday to visit some elderly relatives in Indiana whom I haven't seen for many years: Aunt Gen is 96 and still lives on her own. Cousin Winnie, my godmother, and her husband Tom are in their late 80's.



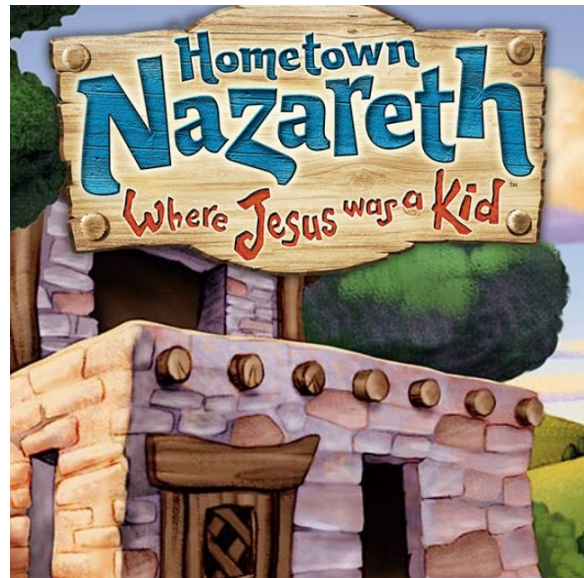
They have 14 children, all grown – 49 grandchildren and 79 great grandchildren! There's hardly space left on their living room walls for any more family photos.

It's always good to get in touch again with our place of origin and all the stories that go along with growing up. Or is it??? One author writes about the power of what she calls "origin stories." *Origin stories tell us who we are, where we come from, and what the world is like. They dictate the things we believe, the brands we buy, the holidays we celebrate, and the people we revere or despise. Sometimes we construct our present realities around our stories of origin; other times we construct our stories of origin around our present realities; most of the time, it's a little of both.*

[*Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* by Rachel Held Evans]

I think most of us would agree that the story of our origins is a 'mixed bag'. Having grown up as the only son of a first-generation Polish immigrant, I witnessed the hard and tedious work of a man, my father, who labored on an assembly line most of his adult life. I value hard work and too often view free time as an indication of laziness. Guilt creeps in if I'm not filling every waking moment with productive toil. That's what my father did; that's a big part of my "origin story." It has shaped my life and I've embraced it. But at times I can feel my origin story's power to oppress and suffocate me.

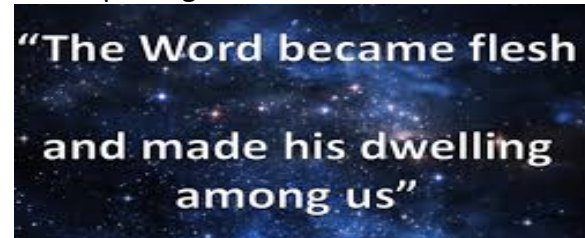
In today's gospel reading, Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth after a wildly successful ministry debut. In the weeks preceding his return, he's developed a widespread reputation for his wisdom and authority. He's proclaimed God's kingdom with provocative parables. He earned the trust of twelve loyal followers, his disciples. He cast out demons, healed the sick, calmed a storm and raised a little girl from the dead. The hometown boy made good. Or so we would think.



But Mark's gospel doesn't show it that way. At first the townsfolk are curious and astonished: *Wow! Where did this guy get all this? He's really smart? And look at the amazing things he's doing!* But in the next breath they're cutting him down. Maybe a jealous old neighbor of Mary's, or a childhood rival of Jesus' pulls out an old "origin story" and starts it circulating around the synagogue: *He's just a carpenter – Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. Who does he think he is?* They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling – and they never got any further. They wouldn't give him cultural permission to outgrow his origin story: *We know exactly where you come from boy. Don't get too big for your britches. Remember your place!* Their suspicion and resentment prevented Jesus' ability to work good on their behalf. Their small-mindedness kept them in spiritual poverty. They were unable to welcome the unfamiliar within the familiar. They couldn't glimpse the extraordinary within the ordinary. They missed the very presence of God in their midst.

The gospel today invites me to wonder how, when and where I misuse origin stories – my own or other people's – to limit God's deeds of power. How do I let others in my life grow and change? When do I box them into stories that are unfairly narrow and constricting? Where in my life do I take offense at the new and the unfamiliar, instead of leading with curiosity and delight? Do I allow the people I'm close to *to become*? Do I allow myself *to become*? Or do I cut myself and others off with burdensome narratives none of us can bear? In order to become whole persons we need to acknowledge and confront our own backgrounds – our race, family and upbringing, our wounds and addictions.

That's no easy task. It takes patience and humility, and sometimes it can hurt a great deal –untangling the stories, sorting fact from fiction and truth from untruth, embracing those stories that move us toward wholeness, while rejecting or reinterpreting those that do harm.



Above all, the gospel calls us to renew our belief in the Incarnation and the scandal that it is. God is the hometown boy made good; He is the lowly carpenter. He is the brother of, the son of, the friend of, the neighbor of. Even in our wounds, as St. Paul discovered, we can find the presence of God at work for our good and the good of others. The message of God's nearness comes packaged in what looks too familiar for us to take seriously. We've often sung a hymn by Marty Haugen entitled: *Here in This Place*: One line sings: *not in some heaven light-years away, but here in this place*. This is where God chooses to meet us, regardless of our origin; *Here in this place* – around the Table of the Word; *Here in this place* - around the Table of the Eucharist.



Remember who you are and where you came from. That could be God's most important message and reminder to us: We are God's children! We come from God's own heart! That an "origin story" we can never outgrow.

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