

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR JULY 11-12, 2021**

Jesus left there and went to his hometown. His disciples followed him. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard him were amazed. They asked, "Where did this man learn these things? What is this wisdom that has been given to this man? How is it that miracles such as these are performed by his hands? ³ Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

⁴ Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own house." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there except to lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ He was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went around the villages teaching.

(Mark 6:1-6 EHV)

Imagine the buzz as Jesus returns to his hometown. It's his second visit since going public as the Messiah. The first time, the good people of Nazareth rushed him out of the synagogue, out of town, and tried to throw him off a cliff. But he's back, and news has spread quickly in this pre-smartphone, pre-Twitter, pre-Facebook world. And why not? Jesus had been busy, or so they'd heard. He'd changed water into wine at Cana, driven out demons, healed all kinds of sick people, calmed a storm on Galilee, and very recently he'd raised a 12 year old girl from the dead! Busy, indeed! The hometown boy has made good.

Jesus arrives and all of Nazareth gathers at the synagogue. It's a small town – possibly 400-500 people – everyone knows everyone else. Everyone knows Jesus. Everyone either grew up with him or knows someone who did. Everyone either went to synagogue school with him or knows someone who did. Everyone had carpentry work done by him or knows someone who did.

He teaches in the synagogue, this local boy who's become something of a celebrity, and there are two reactions. First, many were amazed at his teaching. ***"What is this wisdom that has been given to this man?"*** He's really gotten their attention. But it doesn't take long for the second and more visceral reaction to set in: ***"They took offense at him."*** Where did he get these things, this wisdom? It gets personal. ***"Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't his sisters here with us?"*** His whole family is here. He's nothing special. There's no way he's the Messiah.

So no key to the city. No parade. No props. At least they don't try to throw him off a cliff this time. But why do they reject Jesus? Jesus offers part of the answer, ***"A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own house."*** Familiarity breeds contempt. They knew him. Well. And he was so ordinary. Nothing special. They knew his folks, family, and carpentry. He lived among them for some thirty years in utter ordinariness and humility. If he was holy, he hid his halo well. If he was to be glorified, he'd kept that glory hidden.

This proverb applies today. If I were to receive a call to serve as pastor at St. Matthew's Lutheran in Niles, IL (NW of Chicago) or to Riverview Lutheran in Appleton, WI, or to any WELS church in the Fox Valley area (Appleton – Green Bay), many people would not think of me as Reverend/Pastor Stephen Luchterhand. To many, I would be Steve or even Stevie – that little blond-haired pastor's kid who grew up in their midst. Some might remember my high school nickname, Lucifer, a nickname with demonic implications, though my siblings were the ones who found trouble more than I did. This familiarity is why pastors tend not to serve where they grew up.

99% of you are not pastors/teachers/staff ministers, but the proverb applies to you as well. Sharing God's Word with those you're closest to, with those who know you, can be tough. You can run into, "Who do you

think you are, telling us what to believe? You're not so perfect." This from the people who know what skeletons are hidden in your closet and where the bodies are buried in your backyard.

There's another reason for Nazareth's rejection, a deeper reason: outright unbelief. ***"(Jesus) could not do any miracles there except to lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their unbelief."*** They rejected Jesus' message, refused to believe that the Messiah had come to say what Jesus said, essentially, ***"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."***

Let's bring that message of repentance close to home, to you and me. Would we react the same way that the Nazarenes did? Of what do I need to repent? Really how bad am I/we? On a scale of 1 to 10, or in comparison to some other folks out there, are we really that bad that Jesus has to come after us with an in-your-face, "Repent"?

We do sugarcoat sin to make it appear acceptable. Lying has become "stretching the truth." Cheating is "bending the rules." Lusting – "healthy admiration." Hatred becomes mere "dislike" or "unfriending." Gossiping is only "harmless talk." Foul language is merely "expressing yourself." Murder, drug abuse, child abuse, disobedience, gluttony, alternative lifestyles – you name it, you can claim an excuse or victimization. Makes sense in a worldly wisdom sort of way, in a scenario where it's all about me and God exists in order to give me whatever I want/need, a combination genie in a bottle/divine ATM.

Human hearts/our hearts are by nature stubborn, obstinate, outright enemies of God. In today's Old Testament reading, God gave Ezekiel an unenviable task, to go to the stubborn-hearted, obstinate Israelites who would refuse to listen. Nevertheless, he was to ***"Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them."*** (Ezekiel 2:4b,5)

The apostle Paul dealt with opposition to God and the Gospel throughout his ministry. In today's second lesson, he says to young pastor Timothy, ***"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."*** (2 Timothy 4:2-4) We deal with this very thing today, as did Jesus in his hometown, and just about everywhere he went. It's a fact: **FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S WORD BRINGS...REJECTION**. Not always, but often.

Still Jesus came. And he did more than faithfully proclaim God's Word. He came as the Word made flesh, the God/man who bore the sins of the world, paid the price with his own blood shed on Calvary's cross, suffered the brutal death our sins deserved, then rose from death to assure us that the Father accepted his sacrifice on our behalf.

How does this become yours/mine? What's the difference between the hearts of the people in Nazareth on that day and your heart (and mine)? Faith. They lacked faith, they could not overcome their unbelief and rejection. The Holy Spirit has work faith in our hearts, leading us to repentance, enabling us to claim the forgiveness and life won by Christ as our own. How? Back to Paul – ***"The holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*** (2 Tim 3:15)

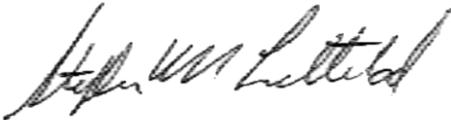
Talk about ordinary, talk about power hidden in weakness. The Word of God exemplifies this. 66 books written and assembled over 1500 years all centered on one theme – the grace of God. You'll find more power hidden in weakness in Word-filled baptismal water and in the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

Moving on from here, from the synagogue, from worship, with the Word of Jesus, let's deal with things accurately, the way they really are. Let's call sin, sin. When people say something that itching ears like to hear, such as, "I'm spiritual, but not religious" in much the same way they might say, "I'm emotional, but not psycho," let's keep the focus on Christ, not "spirituality." Let's call people (including ourselves) to repentance

– not a mere slap on the wrist, a “tsk tsk, there there” kind of scolding – but a command/demand to turn away from sin and turn toward Christ. Faithfully proclaim the entire Word of God and understand that sometimes there will be rejection. It happened to Jesus. It happens to us. And when it does, people are not rejecting you, but Jesus himself and his message. God granting, there will be successes as well – those are up to God. Our task is to simply be faithful.

In a world seduced by success-oriented Christianity, we revel in being losers for Christ, as when Paul said, ***“I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*** (2 Corinthians 12:9b,10) In a world seeking God’s “favor,” which is code for wealth, fame, and good things, we proclaim the favor of God’s undeserved forgiveness, the wealth of his providing everything we need, and the good of knowing that he is working everything out for our good.

Jesus never returned to his hometown – at least there’s no record of such a return visit in the Gospels. How sad. How frightening. We do know that some family members – mother Mary, of course, and later his brothers – did believe. Never take for granted the all-sufficient, all-powerful Word of Christ. It may bring rejection, but it does work salvation. Our task? Faith and faithfulness. By grace, we believe. By the power of the Spirit, we proclaim.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen Luchterhand". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
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