

Views from the Pews - Home town prejudice

After fighting off Satan in the wilderness, Jesus returned to Galilee ‘in the power of the Spirit’. Luke 4:14 simply says ‘a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country,’ with no further details. Fortunately, Matthew 4:12-13 tells us that, after John was arrested, Jesus moved 85 miles (137 km) north to Capernaum, a town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, to begin his ministry well out of reach of potential trouble in Jerusalem. (Matthew 4:14-16 could not resist pointing out the prophesy in Isaiah 9:1-2, that the people in that area have ‘seen a great light’).

He adds: *‘Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him’* (Matt 4:23-25).

The comment at Luke 4: 23 in today’s reading, *‘we have heard what you did at Capernaum’* is puzzling until we check Mark 1:21-26: it was a compassionate but controversial healing in the synagogue on the Sabbath, that caused astonishment among the people and further spread his fame throughout Galilee.

So when Jesus returned to his home town of Nazareth, and attended the synagogue as usual, the people had already heard all about him. It would be interesting to know whether the scroll that was given to him to read from was set for that day, or was his choice, but either way, he did not hesitate to add an astonishing unofficial interpretation: *‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’* Luke adds that all spoke well of him but were reluctant to believe that such gracious words could be coming from someone they had known since childhood. The sceptics said, *‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’* – as if knowing his family background was itself enough to reject any idea that the boy they once knew could now make such an authoritative statement.

Jesus knew that they would ask him to demonstrate his healing powers. But he refused, because, he said, no prophet is accepted in his home town. Moses and Paul also met automatic rejection of their message by their home communities blinded by familiarity and prejudice.

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