

## Homecoming

An Ordinary Time Sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton  
Delivered on August 1, 2021 amid coronavirus  
My first sermon in Geneva as Sr. Pastor

### Mark 6:1-13 NRSV

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. **2** On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! **3** Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. **4** Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." **5** And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. **6** And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. **7** He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. **8** He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; **9** but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. **10** He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. **11** If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." **12** So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. **13** They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

## Preamble

Thanks for being here or tuning in today. If you are worshipping with us for the first time today, I am glad God connected us today. My name is Rob Hamilton and I am the senior pastor here at the United Methodist Church of Geneva - like brand new; today is my official first day.

Before we turn to our scripture today, on behalf of myself, my wife Meghan and our daughters Lily and Ella, I want to extend our thanks for the very warm welcome that you have provided us. Everything from delicious dinners on our first nights, to a clean house and yard and especially when you wear name-tags and introduce yourselves to us all of this has made us feel very welcomed and blessed to be returning to Geneva after 6 really, good years in Rochelle. We look forward to getting acquainted and reacquainted with you either when we are volunteering at the rummage sale this week, at any of our upcoming meet-n-greet sessions this week at the parsonage and even just through the regular course of life and ministry.

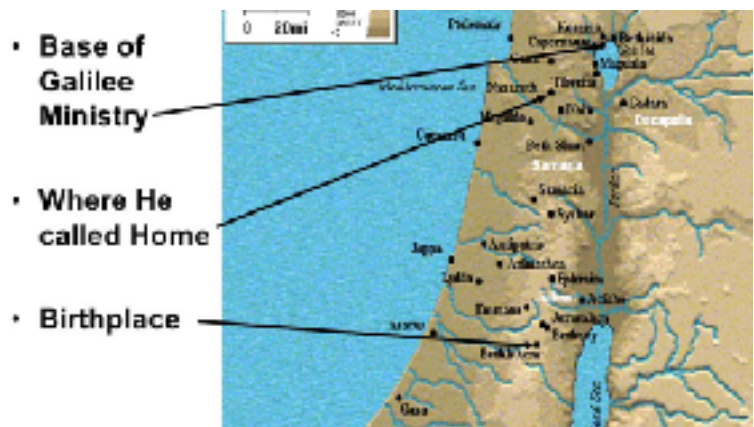
This Sunday and the one after next will be some sermons that introduce you to me. We will celebrate ASP in the middle of those two sermons and then launch into my first series that explores the gospel's call to be in relationship and mission in our neighborhoods at the end of August and through September. So now that I've done a little housekeeping I want to invite us to pause here and set our intention of these next several minutes before God in prayer. Please pray with me:

### Prayer of Illumination

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of all of our hearts, be found acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

### Sermon

As we start to read Mark's 6th chapter, we read that Jesus left that place -meaning the Sea of Galilee region where he had done a whole host of healing miracles- and headed to his hometown which is Nazareth (not his birthplace of Bethlehem). I'm not sure if on that short journey Jesus and his disciples had his playlist loaded with homecoming music from Bruce Springsteen, Eric Church, Twenty One Pilots or Adele but I am sure it was a journey of mixed emotions. Jesus had competing reputations. There was the kid Jesus -that carpenter's son- that everyone remembers. It wouldn't surprise me if those who knew





Jesus' family well even had a nickname for him, like the people from my home church have for me: Robbie. If anyone is calling my Robbie they are from Plattville, IL, 45 minutes south of here.

Though I went to Oswego High School, those folks know me as Rob and I'm sure many of them would be surprised that I am a pastor today, because during my time there I was a gear-head. So what nickname did Jesus have with those who knew him, I don't know, maybe it was Jay? And those who called him by his nickname knew him in his cute chubby cheek days and his angsty pre-teen years and rebellious

teen years while he was finding himself probably had

a hard time reconciling the reputation he had been garnering over the past year of his ministry as someone who spoke with divine authority and performed miracles.

In fact, upon his arrival Jesus first visited the synagogue and started to teach there and as we heard read, they were astounded by what he had to say. After all, Jesus was just a carpenter's son. Jesus wasn't a preacher's kid or torah scholar.

Now I don't know what happened next or what Jesus said or did that turned the crowd's astonishment to cynicism, but by the beginning of verse 3 the people of Nazareth began discounting Jesus based on his parents and siblings. To me it's almost like the people are mumbling to themselves "who does this kid think he is? Does he think he's special because of what he can do? He can just rise up like that." And so by the end of verse three, we learn that the people of Nazareth started to take offense at Jesus.



I want to pause our walk through today's scripture to confess my own curiosity and anxiety as I draw a corollary to my return to Geneva as Senior Pastor after previously serving as the Associate Pastor during what was a difficult period in this congregation's life. I wonder if the excitement of a familiar pastor's return will be like Jesus' return beginning with excitement that someone they were proud of and was doing well, was returning home, but soon found that Jesus wasn't the same and so there is a drastic shift from excitement to cynicism to offense? I wonder this because because like Jesus, I'm not the same person I was when I left here 6 years ago and I'm not returning the position I left, but to a new position that asks different things of me. While I have received many a gracious welcome, I am

not naive to think that there are some who would be cynical or offended simply by my return before I can even speak. I am hopeful that in every case we can give each other some grace to get connected and reconnected so that we don't have a quick turnaround reaction like what happens in verse 4 of Mark's gospel, when he turns to his disciples and tells them "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And because of the people's unbelief, Jesus was only able to heal just a few of their sick.

Now, unlike what is happening with Jesus, we are experiencing something different. I'm not coming home per se, but returning to a good church and hopefully y'all think you are getting a decent pastor back - which is rare in our Methodist system of itineracy, to have a former pastor return. From my first tenure with you, many of us have shared the loving bonds of a church family, but we are not kin and Geneva, while nice, is not my hometown, right. After all, you don't know the embarrassing stories of the stupid stuff I did as a kid growing up in rural Kendall County, some of you simply have the memories of a few years ago. And some of us will get a chance to make first impressions. So while this is different, what Jesus says and experiences in Nazareth is yet another important corollary for us today on this occasion of homecoming.

Jesus's teaching wasn't accepted. His healing power was limited. Why? I think it's because the people didn't just 'lack belief' but they failed to grant him the authority to minister to them. While Jesus is the son of God and has all the divine authority in heaven and earth, people still have to be willing to receive that divine authority and trust the one God sends for God's Spirit to actually work in the lives of people and the community. Now, I'm not so self-diluted to think that I have even an iota of the same divine authority as Jesus, but for over 15 years I've been set apart by the church and ordained under by the church that recognizes that God has uniquely gifted and graced me for ordering the life of the United Methodist Church, but despite all my successes and failures over the tenure of my ministry nearly all of it was only possible because the people I was appointed to share in ministry with by the bishop accepted my leadership and we learned to trust each other with the mission God has called us to.

**God has plans for us to  
share in  
life-transforming  
ministry.**

One of my prayers these past 7+ months of transition is that in the right time we'd learn to trust each other. That you would grant me not only the authority but the holy privilege of serving with you, of leading us as we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. I am called, duly appointed and ready to serve as your Senior Pastor. I have grown and learned so much in the past 6 years, I truly believe that God has reunited us because God has plans for us to share in life transforming ministry until the bishop discerns otherwise. But in the end, the call is yours on whether to accept me as your pastor or send me on my way like the folks of Jesus' hometown had done to him.

If you grant me the authority to pastor you, this church and you trust me to lead as your senior pastor, then I want you to know that I see our mission just as Jesus directed his disciples in the gospels... including how our passage ends today.

At the end of verse 6 we see Jesus traveling teaching about the kingdom of God and so I believe we are called to spread that message of Jesus that is unique to us, not just amongst ourselves but to those who around us who don't know about Jesus. We see in verse 7 that Jesus sends the disciples out in mission in small groups and so we will continue in mission and ministry locally, nationally, and around the globe as partners.

Together, our worship and study will be what equips with authority over unclean spirits and like in verse 12 & 13, that equipping will lead us and our neighbors to a place where our lives are transformed by repentance and forgiveness. By God's Spirit in us, we will cast out the demons of this world like: racism that continues to oppress our siblings and neighbors, and to resist the tribalism that is tearing our country apart, and to counter the persistent fear pouring from all forms of media that keeps us from living the abundant life God provides for all people. Together, we will answer Jesus' call to cast out demons of poverty, addiction and mental health that oppress all of us. Together, we will anoint those who have been hurt and wounded by the demons of the church and culture until God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

I'm all in and ready to go where Jesus sends us. I welcome your company for this strange and wondrous calling we share.