

There is a widespread thought that today's Gospel is a comment on the idea that no one within your community could possibly know what he or she is talking about or that an expert can only come from afar, or even that something or someone who comes from close by or within the circle cannot have gifts of great value. However, I do not believe that is the lesson of this story, because we do not behave that way toward hometown heroes today, and I wonder if the people of Jesus' home did not feel the same way about other hometown boys doing well.

The fact is, we love to brag about our hometown boys and girls who make it big. We relish stories about Jacoby Ellsbury made it big in baseball from the small town of Madras.

Ashton Eaton went from a small town LaPine hero, to a gold medal in the 2016 Olympic Games and I loved meeting Ryan Longwell, the former field goal kicker for the Green Bay Packers when I worked with his mother at Pilot Butte Middle School. We cheer them on even louder when they have been one of us who has gone on to stardom, hoping that a little of that stardust might fall on us. And even when the achievements are not so dashing as these examples, I believe we love it when we see the talents and gifts of those in our midst being recognized in their fields. So, I do not think Mark is saying that we do not appreciate and value of those who sit alongside us in our community. In fact, I think Mark's point in this story is a far more important and far more meaningful one than that. Mark is not saying that we ignore and don't appreciate the local, but that we are threatened by the different. This is

a story about what happens when those in our midst do not abide by the rules that we have come to accept as the norm for our community.////

The people in this story are not indifferent to Jesus and his work. They are not failing to notice him. They have listened, watched, and judged what he is doing and they have found it unacceptable to the point where they are offended, they are scandalized by what he is doing. They are not scandalized necessarily about anything specific that he has said, and they are not scandalized by the healings, but they are scandalized by the fact that he has stepped outside of the expectations that they had of him. He is still a poor, itinerant preacher wandering from here to there. And while his healing is miraculous at times, and what he says is thoughtful and profound, he is not what they pictured in a prophet or a Messiah. So because of this, instead of modifying their expectations, they reject him altogether.

And that is, so often, our reaction to those who do not fit the molds that we have made for them. Those that defy our 'rules' of behavior, those that do not look or behave as we would like them to, or those who choose to make their way in the world in any way that we find unacceptable. Often, they are looked upon with disdain. Across the country there are many who are scandalized by those in the LGBTQ community, and through that disdain, find a variety of ways to marginalize them. To return to our examples of sports heroes; how would we have reacted if Aston Eaton or Jacoby Ellsbury revealed themselves as being gay men. I wonder how our reaction to their phenomenal success in their fields would have been viewed in their hometowns. For some, this revelation that might have been thought to be scandalous.

I have experienced the deep abiding fear involved in seeing someone I love make choices that are way outside of my level of comfort. Many of you lived through my experience with my oldest son as he experienced job loss and homelessness; some of which was in his control and some not. And for some time, he was living a life that made me fear for his safety. It is hard to abide when we are faced with this kind of event. Looking back, I think I was scandalized by the fact that he did not choose to live his life as I believed he should be living it./// The miracle of my story is that my articulate, well-educated, and exceptional son went from the Bethlehem Inn to a six-figure job in Seattle in three weeks; not by conforming to my expectations, but by living within his capabilities and expectations of himself. Any of us who has watched someone we love veering away from how we think they should live knows exactly how this feels. My son still does not live as I might want him to live, and neither did Jesus grow up to live as his community wanted him to live. Jesus lived outside of the expectations of his family and friends. And we know through all the stories of the Gospels, that Jesus lived his whole within how he saw God's expectations of how he was to live.

And there is real good news in this. When we read a story like the one today, we are reminded that we worship a God who is not bound by our expectations. For when all is said and done we come to realize that our expectations are often bound by so many limitations that they do not allow us and those we love to live into what the dream that God dreams for them. We can be scandalized by other people when they do not look like we would wish them to, when they do not behave as we would wish them to, or when they do not conform

to our expectations. But we are not in charge. And by letting go of ourselves and giving it back to God, we can become more of what God would wish for us.

Our Gospel today, in fact, none of the stories in our Gospels address the serious and complex problems that we are facing in our world. The Gospels are not explicit on how to raise our children, how to spend our money or time, or how to vote. No, the Gospels do not give us clear answers, but call us to look at ourselves through human examples of behavior in them, so that we better understand how we fit into the Kingdom of God. The Gospels and stories like the one we heard today can help us alter our perceptions and prejudices, help us to change some of our expectations of others, and help us learn to live more and more into the kind of people God would have us be.