

“Jesus passed through the midst of them,  
and went on his way.”

- Five or so years ago, Katy and I had the chance to see David Copperfield, the magician, live
  - We had planned a little get-away to Las Vegas for our 15th wedding anniversary, and our one son at the time went to the grandparents
  - It was a treat, for sure, and we lived it up.
  - And by that I mean: we slept in, stayed up late, and went to restaurants and shows that you just can't take a little one to
  - Generally just doing what we wanted to do- what a concept!
  - One of those shows, which I thought we just had to see once in our lifetimes, was the legendary David Copperfield
  - In hindsight, I bet there were flashier magic shows we could have attended,
  - And the afternoon showing sort of felt like practice for the evening show...
  - But when I think of magicians, I think of David Copperfield, and I wanted to see him in person
  - Among the many stunts and slight of hand tricks he did that afternoon
  - He made things disappear. Slight of hand, things behind a curtain
  - And Big things. Like a huge 20 foot UFO
  - And what really got me was about 20 people on stage vanishing behind a curtain
    - And reappearing in the rear of the room... and it happened so fast that I really do not think I could have run that distance in that time
    - So how did they!?
  - It was crazy- how a trained and practiced magician can trick your eyes and mind into seeing what they want you to see
  - And not what is really happening
  - That feeling you get when you watch something or someone disappear right in front of you...
  - It is that moment in this Gospel passage that I want to invite us into
  - Jesus passed through the midst of them... unseen. Like magic.
- Now I am not saying Jesus was a magician, or did any tricks here, don't hear this the wrong way

- This is just our entrance into this story, and an attempt to open our imaginations to the scene before us
- There is mention of this in all four of our gospels, as they all have Jesus quoting a version of this saying,
  - “No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.” <sup>1</sup>
- And the three synoptic all record Jesus having difficulties in his hometown right at the start of his ministry<sup>2</sup>
- Luke is the one who gives us here a more in-depth account of what all happened when Jesus headed back to his hometown
- Jesus is just back from his 40 days in the wilderness where he was tempted by the Satan
- He heads back home and begins teaching in surrounding synagogues and temples
- He has not called his disciples yet, so it is just him and he is new and on fire, and he does not hold back
- Which might not be the wisest thing, but we’ve all been there
- I remember graduating seminary and heading into my first parish, and thinking I was pretty much ready
- That my training had more than adequately prepared me to preach, teach, comfort the afflicted, afflict the comforted, run a parish
  - And generally change the world.
- I felt that way, and if I can feel that way, imagine being the Son of God, hot out of the desert where you defeated Satan’s temptations
- And now these people need to hear what you have to say
- These people, and indeed the whole world, need what Jesus is going to say and do for the next couple of years
- Jesus speaks truth when he rolls up the scroll and tells them that this very saying has now been fulfilled in their midst.
- And they ate it up... at first. They were amazed at the gracious words that came out of his mouth
- They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” and that was not a slight, but was respect and amazement at what Jesus was saying
- Which is impressive, and so I think what permeated this next moment was a whole lot of unspoken expectations and disappointments
- We have to read between the lines here to get that, but the atmosphere takes a huge negative turn for reasons we are not privy to

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<sup>1</sup> New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Digital edition, Luke 4:20-27 notes

<sup>2</sup> PulpitFiction, Year C Epiphany 4 2022, <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany4c>

- They are ready to receive Jesus, and ready for Jesus to elevate them to some privileged status
- They were, after all, his hometown. They helped raised him. He was one of them- Joseph's son, the hometown hero returned
- We see this all the time today- Presidential libraries are placed in cities that the former president calls home
  - We have towns and villages with signs at their borders celebrating famous people who were born there
  - Hometown newspaper articles about the local celebrity who made it big and is back
- These folks were full of expectation, entitlement even, expecting the divine favor to be poured out on them first and most
- And ready to put Jesus up on a pedestal and take a step towards turning him into the Messiah they all expected
- The one who would lead the rebellion with sword and shield
- Jesus sees it, and he gets a little upset- the Messiah is not going to overturn sin that way
- Because he knows that is not how God's grace and favor and blessing work
- It is not how it worked in Hebrew Scripture, and it is certainly not how it worked in his ministry, Jesus points out
- It was not reserved for the select few, it was not reserved for a select tribe, nation, or people, and it is not found in violence and power
- Jesus is here to proclaim God's favor to the Gentile, to the poor, to the sinner.
- The meek inheriting the earth, and the poor being blessed.
- They did not like it one bit.
- It was Barbara Brown-Taylor who said, <sup>3</sup>
  - The townspeople were furious because Jesus had taken a swing at their divine privilege
  - Their expectations were disappointed
  - How they thought the world should work was upset
  - And they were filled with rage
  - They rushed him out and with the power of the mob pushed him to the edge of a cliff and were going to just push him over the edge
  - **And Jesus passed through the midst of them, and went on his way**

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Brown-Taylor, quoted on PulpitFiction, Year C Epiphany 4 2022, <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany4c>

- Seems almost like a magic trick, getting through a crowd without them finding him
- But surely in this passage it is focused on spiritual sight just as much as physical sight
- When they failed to see him, they missed out on who he was, on the Epiphany that was right in front of them
- What could have happened if they were able to see and hear and encounter Jesus as he was
  - Rather than how they expected him to be
  - Rather than allowing that disappointment to turn to that mob rage
- As a counter example, we find Paul writing to the church in Corinth in our New Testament reading
  - I don't think anyone is about to be killed by mob, as they were with Jesus in Luke's gospel
  - But the church is wrestling with much conflict- one resource suggests they are dealing with jealousies, rivalry, and immoral behavior<sup>4</sup>
  - And were disagreeing about matters related to marriage, and eating meat offered to idols
    - You know, standard annual meeting discussions.
  - Paul, in his response, has been talking about how diversity and difference makes them stronger
  - A variety of gifts, as he lists many of them
  - But here we find the most significant gifts of the Spirit- gifts available to everyone
  - Faith, Hope, and Love, Paul says, are the ones that endure
    - And the greatest is love.
  - We hear this passage read at weddings a lot, and certainly that is an amazing way to start a marriage
  - But this passage in its original Pauline context is not about the love between two people
  - It is how Christians are to be with one another in church
  - This is the defining characteristic of a Christian and a Christian community
  - It is about the love a community shares, even in the midst of conflict and disagreement
  - Faith, hope and love are the starting points for reconciliation, forgiveness, and healthy relationships
  - Even if all of the other gifts of the spirit faded away, Faith, hope, and love will remain, and are really the only ones we need

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<sup>4</sup> <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1corinthians/0>

- I imagine that if the people who listened to Jesus in Nazareth had only had a chance to read Paul's letter first...
- If they could have found within themselves
  - love instead of rage,
  - faith when their expectations were unmet
  - hope in the face of disappointment
- Maybe the outcome could have been different.
- St. Michael's is gathering today over zoom to look forward to this next year in our annual meeting
  - And I'll give you sneak preview: we are really looking forward not to one year, but to the next 75 years!
  - You'll see
- And I cannot think of a better way approach to these next years than with these examples before us
- It is easy, especially in the dark of winter, and the long-lasting pandemic, to get frustrated
- To become upset, to lose patience, to have expectations disappointed
- You read about it in the news all the time: unruly passengers on airplanes, unruly patrons at restaurants, and rage on the road
- We are called to be a different people, you and I
- What would Paul's letter to the church in Barrington say this year?
- I think it would not be much different- of all the gifts and abilities we have under this roof, they make us stronger
- And the ones that matter most?
  - Faith, hope and love
- Because with these, we can step into the future that might be different than what we expect
- Might be different than what we have done, of what is in our tradition
- We can have healthy relationships and diversity all at the same time
- We can see Jesus in our midst, possibly doing a new thing
- Our task this year is to keep awake, keep on watch, for Jesus in our midst
- To move into a future that is not yet written with the eyes faith and hope, and the ability to be surprised
- To be a place where, as the Gospel of John says, everyone knows we are followers of Jesus because of our love
- For each other, and for the world around us.
- Let's not miss Jesus walking through our midst.

Amen.