



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 7

July 7, 2024

Miracles and Faith

Mark 6:1-13

¹[Jesus] went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³Is 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. ⁴And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” ⁵And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

⁷And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—⁹but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

The problem Jesus encountered on His visit to Nazareth in today’s Gospel, is that His childhood friends and neighbors thought they knew who He was. “Is this not the carpenter? Are not his Mother, his brothers, and his sisters here with us?” “And they took offense at him,” Mark tells us. What, exactly, offended them?

Mark does not tell us the content of Jesus’ preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth, but Luke does. He quotes Jesus reading from the Prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). This part would likely not concern them. But when Jesus “rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down . . . He began to say



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to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’ (Luke 4:21). *This* is what must have spurred the conversation which Mark relates to us, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him?” And, having most certainly heard of His healing of the woman and the little girl mentioned in the previous chapter, they ask, “How are such mighty works done by *his* hands?”

So, Mark says, they were astonished at His teaching, and didn’t believe Him. They thought they knew who He was, and who they thought He was, was not what He was claiming to be, for they knew that in identifying Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, He was claiming to be the Messiah, and this was simply unthinkable. Carpenters don’t become messiahs. Their refusal to believe was based solely on who they perceived Him to be.

This was not a problem unique to the residents of Nazareth, mind you. The religious leaders rejected Him on the basis of who He was . . . and who He was *not* – He wasn’t of their social and political class, for instance. And since He didn’t rise from among their ranks, they simply wouldn’t believe His claims.

They couldn’t deny His works, however. Elsewhere, Jesus says, “Even though you do not believe me, believe the works” (John 10:38). His works were undeniable. Whoever did the things Jesus did? No one! Not even Moses or Elijah did works like His. And the proliferation of works should have gotten the attention of the most ardent skeptic. The crippled man let down through the roof (Luke 5), the healing of the man with the withered hand (Matthew 12), the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11) – these and many other irrefutable works were done by Him. The crowds who ate of the loaves and fishes couldn’t deny His power (John 6); in fact, they came looking for Him the next day, hoping He would repeat the miracle. But when He began to speak of who He really was and why He had come, they turned around and walked away. They wouldn’t believe who He was.

So, Mark says, the citizens of Nazareth were astonished at Jesus’ teaching. But, you know what? He was astonished at them, too. Mark says, “He marveled because of their unbelief.” You know, people believe what they want to believe despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary. And, when it comes to Christ, that mountain may as well be Everest, which, amazingly, people can still ignore if it suits them.

What’s the result of such unbelief? What was the result in Nazareth? Mark says, “He could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.” He could do no mighty work there. Except He did. You see, it’s not that Jesus was incapable of doing mighty works. He’s God; He does what He wants, where He wants, when He wants. Nothing limits God except God. And that’s the point. Jesus will not reward unbelief. He chose to limit His work among the people of Nazareth because they rejected Him.

So . . . faith in Jesus is a vital element in the miracles He performs. What did He say



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to the woman with the issue of blood? “Your faith has made you well.” He said the same to the leper in Luke 17. He encouraged faith in the man with the demon-possessed son, who then replied, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). In many places throughout the Gospels, Jesus speaks of both the necessity and benefit of faith, teaching that God can use even the smallest faith to accomplish great things, saying that “whatever you ask for in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Mat. 21:22). Faith in Jesus, beloved, makes all the difference in the world.

In the end, Jesus left Nazareth. Did He ever return? Scripture doesn’t say. What Mark tells us is that Jesus moved on. “And he went about among the villages teaching.” He took the gospel elsewhere. Eventually, He sends the apostles out to do the work He has been doing. And wherever faith in Jesus is found, they are successful. “They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.” The people of Nazareth missed an enormous opportunity because of their unbelief.

It’s so sad; think of the possibilities. They had Jesus, the Son of God, Immanuel, God in the flesh, the long-awaited Messiah, standing right there in their midst. And they just let Him walk away.

I wonder what their reaction was to the news that He had been crucified. Did they believe the reports that He had risen from the dead? We know that at first His brothers didn’t believe in Him. However, after the resurrection, at least two of them did: James, who became a leader in the church in Jerusalem, and Jude, whose name is associated with the short epistle that precedes the Book of Revelation. Did any of His other former friends and neighbors come to faith in Him? I guess we’ll have to wait ‘til we get to heaven to find out. Scripture’s silence, however, regarding Nazareth from this point on, is not a good indication. With few exceptions, Nazareth missed its chance to receive the blessings its most famous Son wanted to give it.

I also wonder how many times we, due to our lack of faith, miss out on the blessings Christ desires for us. How many miracles have passed us by because we said, “Jesus can’t do *that*. Those kinds of things don’t happen anymore. Why would Jesus want to do that for me? I’m nobody special. He won’t really do anything about my family problems, or my financial troubles, will He?” We become like those in last week’s Gospel who came to Jairus and said, “Your daughter is dead. Don’t bother the teacher anymore.” Do you remember how Jesus responded? Jairus’ faith did not waiver, so Jesus accompanied him and brought his little girl back to life!

Parents neglect to have their children baptized because they don’t believe anything happens in baptism. People neglect the Sacrament of the Altar either because they think it’s no big deal or that they can come back some other time to receive it. Many people don’t even go to church anymore because they’ve lost the conviction that our Savior actually meets us here and ministers to us through His Means of Grace. These are all



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symptoms of a festering unbelief, the kind of doubt James refers to when he writes: “The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (Jam. 1:6-7).

Beloved, Jesus wants to do great things for you, miraculous things, one of which is to strengthen your weak faith. When the man said, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” Jesus immediately did the thing that would strengthen his faith the most: He healed his boy and cast the demon out.

Look, I know how challenging having faith can be. Trust me, I do. But remember, we’re not talking about some nebulous belief that amazing things can happen; we’re talking about faith in Jesus, the One who died for us and rose again, the One who has promised to be with us when we gather in His name, the One we fully expect to see one day in our own resurrected bodies, as we stand in His presence and meet Him face-to-face. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, and our soon-coming King. How can we believe all that and still doubt that He wants to do astounding things for us even now?

The citizens of Nazareth didn’t have faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. So it makes sense that they didn’t believe He could perform miracles. You do believe in Him, so believe in Him all the way. He’s the One whom winds and waves obey; He’s the One who created all things by the breath of His mouth; He’s the One before whom even death must bow. Oh, beloved, Jesus is here and He wants to do great things for you. As Paul writes to the Romans: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom. 8:32). Don’t doubt, beloved, only believe [Mark 5:36; John 20:27]. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen