

February 5, 2025 @ 0830  
Lordos Hotel, Larnaca, Cyprus  
A sermon by the Rt. Rev. James B. Magness

Hebrews 12.4–7, 11–15  
Psalm 103.1–2, 13–18  
Mark 6.1–6a

What a rude welcome Jesus got —in his hometown, amongst his own people as well! It was so bad that he couldn't do more than a handful of healings. Hmm. It makes me think.

By my best calculation, I am —as the crow flies — 9,730 kilometers from my hometown and the people who know me. Perhaps, being that far away from my hometown, you might give me a few advantages Jesus couldn't get from his people.

In more than a few ways, I can identify with Jesus' situation. Every time I go back to the hometown parish where I grew up, after having been ordained for 48 years, someone will come up to me and tell me about how they used to know my mother – and – sooner or later there will come a story she used to tell them about how I behaved when I was a boy. Perhaps some of you have had similar experiences.

Yes, Jesus really was having a tough time in Nazareth! The author of Mark's Gospel tells us that he was stifled by five questions:  
“Where did this man get all this knowledge?”  
“What is this wisdom that's been given him?”  
“What are the deeds of power he is doing?”  
“Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary?”  
“Aren't his sisters here with us?”

To this reader the five questions can be reduced into one: “Who does he think he is? He's no better than us!”

This Nazareth story is emblematic of the life Jesus will live. From the very beginning of his life Jesus was a hunted man, repeatedly rejected by people in positions of power. What if — what if — feeling rejected and unable to bear that burden, Jesus had ended his mission, right there? There would have been no travel from village to village, no more teaching, no more healing, and more importantly, no cross and therefore no redemption. The status quo — something to which most families and communities are quite dedicated — would have been perpetuated. Had Jesus not engaged people in the way he did, think where we would be today. Would we ever choose to stand face to face with the darkness and evil of this world?

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century I am aware of how easy it is for people of our Christian faith tradition to become discouraged, particularly in those places where we are the extreme minority. Yet, as many times I've been reminded, it's all about how you frame your life situation. Is your situation a liability or an opportunity?

Some years ago, I was with a delegation of Christians in Jerusalem who were members of a benevolent order whose mission was to provide educational support for Christians in the Holy Land. We had the opportunity to meet with the Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarch, Matthias I. During the meeting and through our interpreter, a member of our group asked the Patriarch about the diminishing numbers of people in his faith community. Hearing the question, he grinned and spoke to the interpreter. Next the interpreter grinned and said, "The Patriarch wants you to know that he is comforted to remember that during Jesus' day there weren't many Christians around either." His message was clear. The mission is not numbers, but faithfulness. God will provide, and opportunity will follow.

Jesus' rejection, which was really the rejection of his authority, is a central part of our Christian story. In our tradition, Jesus is the ultimate wounded servant leader and healer. The late Roman Catholic priest Henri Nouwen has described the essence of Jesus' woundedness. In a book entitled [The Inner Voice of Love](#), published on the day of Nouwen's death, he addressed the peculiar place of the wounded servant leader and healer within God's created order. He offered this warning to Christ-followers, and I quote: "People will constantly try to hook your wounded self. They will point out your needs, your character defects, your limitations, and sins. That is how they attempt to dismiss what God, through you, is saying to them."<sup>1</sup>

Within our Christian tradition, woundedness and servant hood are the essential characteristics of authentic leadership and authority. Jesus' challenge in Nazareth that day was the rejection of his authority. He didn't fit into their spectrum of expectations. The result was evident in his diminished power to serve. For Jesus, there would be another day of wounded servanthood when his authority over sin and darkness would bring God's light into the world.

Authority is a sensitive word, particularly when we apply it to the wounded servant model Jesus embraced. In a world that more each day leans toward tough and harsh monarchical leaders, our Anglican Christian tradition is the exception to that prevailing norm. As Anglicans we understand leadership within the context of collegial servanthood. As a body of Christians we come together in a collegial fashion to entrust our leaders with the authority to serve the people committed to their charge. In the traditions of the earliest councils of God's church, we come together collegially to grant the authority to the servant-leader — who also is the model of the wounded one in our midst.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen, [The Inner Voice of Love](#). 86.

And that my sisters and brothers is the world in which we live, move and have our being. With all our weaknesses and imperfections, wounded servanthood is the model to which Jesus has called us. With all that we have and all that we are, we are called to disrupt this world's ways of thinking and acting. In so doing we become one with Christ and are continually transformed — in order to do what God calls us to do, when and where God calls us — even if that happens to be in your hometown. AMEN.