

Loving and life-giving God, Help us to know you as our shepherd, as our king, as our teacher, our redeemer and our friend. Help us to know you as the one who is always faithful.

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As the gospel readings have continued from week-to-week, we've now come to the end of a cycle dealing with the question of faith.

Nicodemus has come to Jesus in the night and his famous conversation about being born again, and about faith.

The faith of the disciples was tested when they were on the boat at night on the Sea of Galilee. They didn't have the faith that Jesus would protect them. After Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, he admonished the disciples about their lack of faith.

And last week upon the return of Jesus to the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee, we had two great lessons of faith. First lesson about faith from the father of a little girl, and the other a lesson about faith from a woman who had been sick for 12 years.

And today we have a story of Jesus coming home to Nazareth. And just like his own disciples in the boat, his hometown friends have no faith in Jesus.

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You can just imagine their conversation after Jesus had showed up one day back in the synagogue of his youth. Who does he think he is?

Everyone knew who Jesus was. They knew his mother. They knew his brothers. They knew his sisters. They had watched Jesus grow up from the time he was just a kid. He had learned the same craft as his father.

*If Joseph really was his father.* That was always one of those conversations that seemed to taper off into embarrassed silence.

But anyway, they had watched Jesus grow up – until he took off and caught up with his cousin John. Everyone knew John was a little crazy. Wearing all that camel skin and eating honey and bugs.

When Jesus took off after John, everyone shook their heads and worried about his poor mother Mary. What was she going to do now?

And now – here Jesus is – back. And not alone, but with a bunch of people following *him* around, like he was a rabbi or something. Well, they had heard that Jesus was a good story-teller, and that he might even be a faith-healer.

You can almost imagine the people of Nazareth saying: “That’s all well and good, if you go in for that sort of thing. But we are a little more traditional around here. And honestly, all that preaching and teaching and healing just seems a little offensive to us. Maybe it would be better if Jesus would just really leave town for good and go somewhere else where he might find the sort of people who go in for that sort of thing. *Just who does he think he is?*”

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The translation of the Christian Testament that we heard today reads that the people of Nazareth *took offense* at Jesus. That’s not really the best translation from the Greek. A better choice would be to say that the people of Nazareth were *scandalized* by Jesus.

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To be scandalized by Jesus. Can you imagine such a thing?

Does Jesus scandalize us today? Is the message that he brought still a scandal to us? Or is the church like the people of Nazareth?

So comfortable with what we know about Jesus, so familiar, so complacent, so pre-occupied, so *whatever* – that we don't hear the message.

And then when the message is said loud enough or often enough to get the attention of the church, are we scandalized all over again?

Maybe it would be better if that message - Maybe it would be better if the people who tell that story - Maybe it would be better if those people would just really leave town for good and go somewhere else where they might find the sort of people who go in for that sort of thing.

Sounds sadly familiar doesn't it?

What's the message that we tell, as that part of the kingdom of God gathered here in Poughkeepsie? What's our story? What kind of people are we?

Is our message one that will scandalize the world – like the message of Jesus? Is our story one that will scandalize the world – like the story of Jesus? Are we the kind of people who can scandalize the world – like the early church did?

Jesus might have been a scandal to his hometown friends in Nazareth.

But he wasn't a scandal to Jairus when his little girl was sick and about to die. The people of Nazareth might have been happy to see Jesus go, but you can bet that the woman who bled for 12 years, was happy to see Jesus and to be able to touch him.

Jesus might have scandalized Nicodemus with his wild talk about being born again, but we know from scripture that Nicodemus did open his ears, and his mind, and his heart, and hear the message and the story.

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It's a matter of faith. And not so much *our* faith.

It's always a mistake when we hear these stories from the Bible, when we assign the 'hero's role' to one of the characters.

Nicodemus wasn't the real hero of his story. It isn't *his faith* that we should be drawn to.

Jairus wasn't the real hero of his story. It isn't *his faith* that we should be drawn to.

The hemorrhaging woman wasn't the real hero of her story. It isn't *her faith* that we should be drawn to. So far in the story of Jesus that Mark has given us the disciples aren't the heroes. It isn't their faith that we should be drawn to.

And David certainly wasn't the hero of his story. As we hear more of his story in the coming weeks, it should become very clear that

It isn't *his faith* that we should be drawn to.

It isn't from the faith of any of these characters from which we should draw our inspiration or model.

Whose faithfulness is it – that should be our model?

It's the faithfulness of God upon which we should base our hope, base our trust, base our lives. God is faithful. There's no question about that.

Our response as a national church is what is at question. Are we capable of telling our story as a people of God to the rest of the Anglican communion?

God is faithful. There's no question about that.

Our response as a parish is what is at question. Are we prepared to proclaim the scandal that is the message of the gospel to the community around us?

God is faithful. There's no question about that.

Our response as individuals is what is at question. Can our lives and our relationships mirror even a pale reflection of the faithfulness to which God calls us.

Loving God with our entire heart. Loving God with all of our mind. Loving God with every ounce of our strength. Loving our neighbor as ourselves. Loving ourselves.

God is faithful. There's no question about that.

God is the hero of all of these stories. May we never forget that.

Loving and life-giving God, Help us to know you as our shepherd, as our king, as our teacher, our redeemer and our friend. Help us to know you as the one who is always faithful.