

The Rev. Dr. Cornel Barnett
Redwoods Presbyterian Church
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Mark 6:1-6
“Hometown Blues”

Andres Iniesta is the Michael Jordon of world soccer, except that he is 5'7" tall.

His team Spain won the World Cup two years ago and the European Championships four years ago and last weekend. Iniesta was named Player of the Tournament after the World Cup and was Player of the Match in a number of the Euro games.

Chronicle sports writer Bruce Jenkins wrote last Friday: “The joke about Iniesta, the peerless midfielder who could pass for a banker, is that when he travels between countries, he has nothing to declare, only his genius.”

Iniesta comes from a humble family in Spain – Iniesta means “gardener.” He was first spotted by scouts as a 12-year-old and enrolled in the Barcelona Soccer Youth Academy. The boys at the academy lived in a farmhouse.

Iniesta said he cried the first few days at the academy. He is naturally shy and stuck to himself in the beginning. His talent and quiet leadership came to the fore and in a short while he captained Spain's youth teams.

It is said that he makes frequent visits home and one can imagine when he does he is accorded star status. He's the local kid made incredibly good and is probably treated with the utmost respect and when asked for an opinion in his expertise people listen with all ears and eyes.

The opposite happens to Jesus in the gospel story today. He is back home and he exhibits great deeds of power and wise teaching in this hometown synagogue and he is rejected by the locals. Jesus didn't have the press that Iniesta has. Instead he demonstrates his brilliance for the first time to his hometown crowd and they spurn him.

They say: “Is not this the carpenter (as if carpenters have no talents outside of working with wood), the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us? That doesn't compliment Jesus' family. The text states that they are offended by Jesus, presumably with his audacity to be rabbi among them.

An amazing aspect of the story is that Jesus is somewhat disempowered by the experience. The story goes on to say: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ And *he could do no deed of power there*, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.”

Jesus has the hometown blues. Our Book of Confessions says that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. That's a so-called Christological statement. As a human being Jesus is deflated by the criticism of his mission. As a card carrying member of the human race I can relate.

The people in effect disrobe and defrock him. They couldn't see through the hometown boy to the prophet. Jesus is amazed at their "unbelief." The people deny themselves ministry and growth because of their myopia.

How might we be open to the ways God visits and speaks to us? How do we get beyond customary ways of looking at things? How do we block out Jesus in our daily lives? What conventions prevent us from recognizing Jesus as wise teacher, healer and prophet in our midst? How are we hearing God in today's contemporary/innovative worship?

Think of the person or persons from whom you least expect to hear God speaking to you and see how God might in fact be speaking to you. It will surprise you immensely.

We can draw an analogy from the ant in the Book of Proverbs which says in 6:6-11: "Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise. Without having any chief or officer or ruler, it prepares its food in summer, and gathers its sustenance in harvest. How long will you lie there, O lazybones? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior."

If we can learn from an ant how come Jesus' hometown crowd could not learn from him?

I watched recently a video of the horrendous earthquake in the ocean off Indonesia and the resultant tsunami that hit Sumatra, Indonesia; Thailand; and Sri Lanka in 2004. Before one's eyes one sees coastal resorts and towns ravaged by the crushing surge of water. In the hours and days of mayhem and many voices and cries one voice leaves an indelible mark. It's the voice of a little girl, a European tourist in Thailand, who says "I want to go home." Days before she expressed how lovely it was in this coastal paradise.

I heard the voice of Jesus in this girl. Jesus is in our homes. As mentioned in the "Time with the Younger Church" home is where the heart is, in other words, Jesus is present in our homes whenever we experience compassion, kindness and love. One can argue that he's also there when we experience pain and hardship. It requires recognition.

While the girl in Thailand looked forward to returning to her European home I saw home as the church, this church where thankfully Jesus is always at home and affirmed.

In the end, the gospel story today is about faith as were the stories of the last two weeks.

Two weeks ago Jesus chastises the disciples for having no faith when they immediately call out to him from the boat in the storm. Jesus felt they had given up too quickly on their own abilities and resources to handle their situation. He's saying: Take responsibility, affirm your gifts and get involved – then call out to me.

Last week Jesus lauds the faith of the women who spent 12 years seeking healing for her ailment. With nothing to lose and everything to gain she trusts that by touching Jesus' clothing she will be healed. She does so and is healed. Jesus says to her: "Your faith has made you well."

While Jesus criticizes his disciples two weeks ago and affirms the faith of the ailing woman last week, he is simply "amazed" at the unbelief of people in his hometown. He demonstrates incredible wisdom in teaching and power in healing and they refuse to believe in him because from their point of view he's an insignificant hometown boy.

I hope Jesus never looks into our building or into our hearts and says: "I'm amazed with your unbelief." There might be occasions when this is so and if so we can correct ourselves and reaffirm our faith in Jesus Christ as:

Wise teacher: The one who reveals God's word as inclusive and holistic.

Healer: The one we turn to in our pain, the one we trust when we are down and the one who heals our every heartache.

Prophet: The one who challenges us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

I would hazard a guess that there's no hometown blues for Jesus in your home and I believe there's none in this church. Jesus is Andres Iniesta and more for us. Amen.