

¹ Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles!" ³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Our understanding of Jesus is that he is compassionate and desires to heal those who are sick and give hope to those who are in need. In many ways we have translated this understanding into our institutional self-perception as a church. Therefore, when we read of Jesus' experience and reaction in his home town we are more than a little troubled. It seems so inconsistent with the rest of the Gospel narrative that Jesus would be so human as to take affront at their personal attacks and punish them accordingly. Even worse, when we read it more closely, we are told that *He could not do any miracles there*. The One who had the power to cast out a legion of demons, heal the woman and raise the dead girl *could not do any miracles* because the people said nasty things about him? If that is true, then what are we to do as a church? Are we to withdraw from the world like the community at Qumran and concentrate on our righteousness?

The first rule of scriptural interpretation is that Scripture interprets Scripture. The above conclusion is inconsistent with the rest of the Gospel narrative, so it must be inaccurate. Jesus is compassionate and desires to heal those who are sick and give hope to those who are in need, but his ministry and purpose are greater than that. We have confused the means with the ends. Jesus is not the vehicle for meeting our needs and healing us. Jesus is the answer to our needs and our salvation. He reveals that it is through a relationship with him, and therefore, God, that we are made whole. What the people are rejecting in this passage is the opportunity to have a relationship with Jesus. His miracles are not magic acts, but aids for us in our perception of who Jesus is and invitations to enter into relationship with him. If that is the purpose, then to reject a relationship with Jesus is to reduce his miracles to the level of magic, and Jesus will not allow that.

For the church, the message is that we are to go and do likewise. In our cultural situation, we have the resources to meet many of the needs of people, and it is incumbent upon us to do so. However, what we must never do is divorce our social action from our invitation to people to come into relationship with us and through that, a relationship with Jesus Christ. To do so is to cease to be the church and become just another arm of the welfare state.

Lord, keep me focused on you, especially when I am reaching out to others. Help me to be inviting about a relationship with you, and to be motivated by a love that desires my neighbor to have a relationship with you. Amen