May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

The story of today’s Gospel passage must make us at least willing to ask: Where is Jesus to be found? Where do we encounter the Holy? What sort of Jesus do I permit entrance into my life? Is it a domesticated Jesus who serves my agenda?

Who are the hometown kin of Jesus today? Could it be us? Most of us have somehow grown up with Jesus. And that is a gift, a real grace. But there is a potential danger in that… in the sense that, because we claim to know Jesus so well, we could be his toughest audiences, especially when he challenges us, when he tries to dislodge us from our comfort zones, when he summons us to conversion…. Do we needing conversion? I have been a Christian all my life…

Let’s dive into the gospel story to see if there are any hints as to where Jesus can most reliably be found.

The story opens in his hometown, and his disciples follow him. It’s an interesting detail: Jesus is returning home, but he’s different in several ways now, not the least of which is, that he has followers who are from Galilee.

The ones in the synagogue who hear Jesus’ preaching are astounded: “Don’t we know this guy?” “That’s right! I know his brothers and sisters. Who does he think he is?” Something like that. Jesus is unrecognized in his hometown. He is recognized of course, but he is not accepted as one who is deeply connected with God. Indeed, once they do begin to recognize him, they are offended by him.

 “*Prophets are not without dishonor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.*” And the narrator tells us that Jesus couldn’t do any deeds of power except a few healings.

Jesus and his followers then leave Nazareth and enter the villages that presumably surrounded the big city. And then something interesting happens. Jesus pairs off his followers and sends them out with special instructions. They do, they preach repentance, they heal, and they call out evil when encountered. Jesus doesn’t do a deed of power to embarrass the old home locals; he instead authorizes others to go out in his name to heal, testify to God’s love, to call out evil. This is how God operates.

This should concern all of us who claim to know who and what Jesus is. The church is the hometown of Jesus, as it were. So, it is good to ask ourselves again: are we offended by him? Do we allow Jesus to be Jesus or have we domesticated him into a mere kindly carpenter? The church has, at times, carefully kept Jesus in a safe and contained box, but Jesus keeps leaving the familiar, keeps empowering others, and most importantly keeps showing up in strange places that are not only his hometown.

Don’t you know that we disciples are always playing catch-up to the Risen Lord? Ever since that day when the women found an empty tomb, ever since then, we have been going to where Jesus has gone ahead of us, into Galilee, into the villages, into our neighborhoods. And once we go there, seeking him in the face our neighbors, he will be revealed, and we just might be empowered to do his work: healing wounds, preaching God’s love, and calling out evil.

Let us go from here, into the villages following Jesus where he has already gone—and not simply following him, but being empowered by him to do his work of love and healing which the world so desperately needs. Amen.