



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

How many of you had a reputation in high school, that maybe was not the best? Or maybe is there something that you were known for in high school that was not always a becoming trait? Come on now fess up? Were there things you did in public that gave you a reputation? Did you do some prank that people would remember? Were you caught drinking and then kicked off the team because of it? Skinny dipping or streaking?

Well, guess you can figure out where I am going. Reputations are often times easy to create and hard to shake. As an adult, I am sure most of us have a few

things in our lives we would like to forget we did, or at least hope that others would forget as well.

My high school class is having our 50th class reunion in August this year. A group of folks started planning this years ago. Our class was over a thousand kids. They have posted an on-line data base of those of us that they have found, about 900 some. As I looked through the names, first of all, I was astonished as to how many had died. And the second thing I noticed was how many still lived in the Milwaukee area where our high school was. Some of those kids I knew in high school should have moved far, far away from the area as their reputation proceeded them and it was not pretty. Not that I was a goodie two shoes, but other than being the Drum Majorette of our marching band, I really had no claim to fame either good or bad.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus comes home to Nazareth to teach in His home synagogue. When the words come out of his mouth, at first, the people are impressed at his knowledge. But then they begin to think of who is talking. It is just the carpenter's son, Jesus. And they wonder, how he got this knowledge? How is it that he can not only heal people, but what gives him the right to tell us what God is all about. He never even studied to be a rabbi. And after all, He is Mary's son who used to play kick ball in the streets, fish with their sons in the creek, skinned his knee and when home crying. Yes, Jesus before he was the Savior of the world, was Mary's son, just a local boy.

Like many of my classmates Jesus did not travel far from home. And at home as our scripture text says, "They took offense at him." Who does He think he is, trying to teach us? He leaves the crowds, his old neighbors, with these

words from verse 4 , “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” Jesus was stunned by the unbelief of the folks in his hometown. I can only guess that he was quite disappointed in their attitudes and their inability to see Him for who He really was. And so after this scene, we never hear of Jesus returning to Nazareth again. Someone else would have to tell His hometown folks about God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Somebody else would have to share the good news with them that there is forgiveness and salvation through the grace of God.

And here we are more than 2000 years later, I think we can understand what Jesus was up against when we talk about faith. We simply think back to our younger years, conjuring up images where we might not be proud of our past. More is going on here than the old phrase, “familiarity breeds contempt.” If people know us and our past too well, can we encourage them in their walk with Christ? Although Jesus had a perfect life, we surely cannot claim the same. He was shunned in his hometown, and how then can we expect people to look at us and believe us when we talk about God, Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. I am still wondering what those classmates of mine would say if they knew I grew up to be a Lutheran pastor.

I was not a terribly good student in high school. I usually had a hard time passing gym class and I was not a beauty queen, or a cheerleader. Actually, as I look back, I was pretty “Normal” or “ordinary” if you will. And part of being normal was being sinful, doing things I was not proud of. And that is exactly why we need Jesus, because we are sinners. We can share our stories of God’s forgiveness because that is what gives us hope for the future. Telling the story

of our screwed-up lives makes us human, certainly not perfect. But folks, our credibility does not come from us, it comes from God, as a gift of grace. That is the story we all have, and the story we have to tell.

So, whether or not, people can get past our past is up to them. God works in us to bring the good news to those who need to hear it. You come to Christ the Servant each week to not only worship but to listen to the Good News I share about God's love. You look past the stuff I'd like to hide, my sinfulness. I do admit that a swear slips out of my mouth on occasion. And I too often complain, poor Rodney gets to hear that. I sometimes feel sorry for myself if things are not going right. And I certainly don't always treat my body as a temple. I am only human and do the best that I can as I try to be honest about my life, my flaws, my regrets and my imperfections.

I look to the one who hung on the cross for all of us, who died a terrible death to save us from all our sin and shame. God offered his only son, Jesus, to die for us because he loved humanity so much. And folks, he continues to love us today, just as we are, broken and sinful. God knows our past. He knows our story. He knows where we came from. and he loves us anyway. That is the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not have to qualify or be perfect to receive it. It is a free gift if we simply are honest about our lives, repent, and live them having faith. Faith in the One who makes all things new.

I do understand that we don't always feel like we are deserving of God's love. Our faith is made stronger in hearing God's word, listening to each other's stories and singing His praises. After all we are all in this life together. God wants us to have companionship on our journey. He sent the disciples out two

by two to preach and teach the Good News of God's love for all. Possibly we are sent out together to strengthen one another's faith, possibly two people give each other credibility and possibly because having a partner causes one to resist temptation. Whatever the reason, God wants us to go into the world and tell His story. His story about how He loves us no matter what our past looks like, no matter what we have done or how unlovable we feel. Our God is a great big God that gives the gracious gift of pure unadulterated love. A free gift to all those who have faith that He is the Savior of the World. **AMEN**