

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Sep 1st 2014

You Can't Go Home Again is the title of an important American novel that I've actually never read; the saying seems to me to fit today's Gospel, along with another one: "You can't step into the same river twice." As the river flows on, life continues; each minute, each day, each year is always new, and never repeatable. Our young students beginning their lives in college and university may feel this, facing their new lives and unable to go back to their high school years or young childhood. Or maybe they already felt that almost grown-up nostalgia, years ago in seeing the "little kids" go off to the grade school / primary school that they had left behind.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus has already been baptized by John the Baptist and has prayed and fasted and been tempted by the devil in the desert. He has been traveling and teaching in the synagogues of Galilee – in other words, he has already taken up his public mission when he comes to his "home town" of Nazareth and, as we hear today, announces his power and authority.

Today's first reading and Psalm are also about divine power and authority. Paul tells the Corinthians that he teaches not to convey his own wisdom and expertise, but to demonstrate God's "spirit and power." In the Psalm, the refrain, "O Lord I love your commands," follows from saying that obeying God gives us wisdom, understanding and discernment.

Jesus knew in advance that his former neighbors, who had known him as a child and as a young man, would be not only shocked and suspicious of his proclamation but also jealous and angry. Feeling those emotions in the crowd, he would have felt the pang of recognizing that he couldn't go back to his earlier life in Nazareth. Ordinary human failings prevent his audience from seeing who he is and what he is doing now. And surely, filled with God's power, committed to his mission, he never meant to stay in Nazareth anyway.

We can understand the human sins of jealousy and anger and unbelief in these people of Nazareth. Recently we saw news reports on our American television of angry protest marches, throwing stones and looting; now we recognize the even more violent and angry mob at Nazareth. What we can't explain or take for granted is how Jesus walked through the crowd and away – away, into the world, to teach all of us through the rest of earthly time. Divine teaching, power and authority are calmly demonstrated for us in this scene, and then the public life of Jesus on earth goes on, and leads finally to Jerusalem, his death and his Resurrection – and our salvation.

Our God-given lives continue through years and decades, the stages of life advance, and we can't go

back. This is the last Reflection I will have posted to this website as my employment at Creighton University will end in the next few weeks. I can't go back to the joys and troubles of earlier days, earlier responsibilities and opportunities – but that's OK. Whatever life gives me in whatever time I have ahead, my faith tells me that Jesus is always with us who believe in him. As the "Amazing Grace" hymn says, "The Lord has promised good to me / His word my hope secures."

A very special thanks to Mary Kuhlman for her faithful commitment to sharing her faith filled reflections with us over these years.

Mary, may your trust in the Lord's goodness to you, be fulfilled.

Mary Haynes Kuhlman - Creighton University Student