

Surely, someone must have objected.

When the early Christians first heard the story of Jesus' return to his hometown and home synagogue...and just how badly that went...how "they took offense at him"...and "he could do no deed of power there"...then was it really wise to repeat such a story? Didn't such a story potentially undermine the Christian witness to Jesus, especially when the first Christians were already under suspicion and assault by the Roman Empire and others? Couldn't Jesus' hometown story raise doubts? Wouldn't it have been better to just...leave that part of the story out? That would have been a very fair question...for those who cared about the story of Jesus...knowing the great and good effect that Jesus was having on their life...and the mission they believed they had been given by the Holy Spirit to proclaim him.

I know too, that often these days, there tends to be a kind of binary approach to the Gospel stories, and the Bible as a whole...that either the Gospel stories are a bunch of well-intended but still *completely fictitious stories* that should not be taken seriously except perhaps in an ethical or aesthetic sense...or there is the opposite view that everything in the Gospels are *completely factual and historical*...and to say anything less is to disrespect them. But I think the truth is that, like so many things, the truth is somewhere in the *middle*. The Gospel stories *are* a complex *weaving* of fact, history, and creative storytelling...in the service of the truth of Jesus... and it is not always possible to tease out just which is which. But the offensive story of Jesus' experience in his hometown, among the people he grew up with, and who should have known him best—I think it is fair to say that if it was purely a fiction that that story would never have been told. The only reason it could possibly have survived is because it was...a fact—as inconvenient as it was...and that it was a fact that somehow deserved to be remembered.

So, today...we are remembering it. And perhaps there is even something providential that we are remembering it on the Sunday after Independence Day...when our thoughts wander toward our country...and our near future. Whatever you think of this present national moment...wherever you may as a citizen be prepared to cast your lot...the truth is...there is plenty of *offense* to go around...and everybody is grievously offended over something...whether it is true or not...and there is very much at stake. These years of our lives will be a difficult chapter for future historians to write. And it will be difficult to capture the scope of it all, not to mention the fact that it will, as usual, be tempting later to only tell parts of the story that serve some future agenda.

But the Gospel story of Jesus will have no truck with any such selective storytelling. Because in every place and time...and every place and time of offense...Christians nevertheless have a mission. What did Jesus do when he found himself within the offense of his hometown? Well, first, he did, as the Gospel says, manage to lay his hands on at least a *few* sick people and cure them. *But then he kept on moving and doing the work that his Father had given him to do.* In fact, he even expanded his mission after the great offense...by sending out his disciples two-by-two to continue his teaching, to seek the hospitality of others, spend time with others, hear their sins and private torments, and bless them. *The work of truth and reconciliation, unexpected friendship and healing, continued all the more. It did not end with the great offense.* Regardless of what happens in the months to come, this same mission from Jesus still calls us. Christians are called to be citizens of their homeland...but also called to be even *more* than citizens of our homeland. We are gifted with a mission from Jesus, which is a mission from God, in the company of the mission of the Holy Spirit. Our Christian mission continues on.

And so we will *pray* for our country...we will give *thanks* for our country...and give thanks that the Church can have a *home* in this land. We will also *critique* our country...seek to *correct* our country...and *work* for our country's welfare...as best we can understand. We will silence none of our great offences of the past—neither of our Church...or our country--because we are not done with our mission. We must keep on moving, from generation to generation. There is still so much truth...and reconciliation...unexpected friendship...and healing...to hope for...and to seek. And God is not done with any of us yet.