

Grace Abounds in Music

Mark 9:30-37

Introduction

Where are you from? We all get asked that question asked of us from time to time. In these days of high mobility it is the rare person who has never lived anywhere other than the place they now live. Very few of you could answer that question by saying “born and raised in Springfield.”

My wife Karen and I have lived in Springfield for 35 years now, but neither of us has been here our entire lives.

- I was born in St. Marys, OH. We moved to a military base in Maryland when my dad was recalled during the Berlin airlift. Back to St. Marys.
- As Dad began his preparation for the ministry we lived in Huntington, IN and then moved to Van Buren IN where he pastored his first church
- After college I lived again in Huntington before Karen and I were married.
- We moved to Mooreland IN, and later New Castle, IN.
- Then it was on to Columbus, OH before finally coming to Springfield.

So while I am living in Springfield and have lived here for a long time, that's not where I'm from. I've lived here long enough for this to feel like home, but I got my start in a different place. What about you?

If you were to pose that question to Jesus, He would probably respond like this. Not counting the eternal span of time spent in heaven before His earthly birth ...

- He was born in Bethlehem and lived there until he was two years old.
- Because his life was at risk – King Herod wanted to kill him – his family moved to Egypt for a while.
- Later they moved back and settled in the village of Nazareth.
- But now, during the time of this Gospel story, he was living in the town of Capernaum. He moved out of Nazareth to Capernaum because the religious leaders in Nazareth tried to kill him too. Luke 4 tells us they thought Jesus, who they had known since he was a child, was a bit uppity by proclaiming to be the Messiah, so ...

They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:29-30)

His new destination? Capernaum. Capernaum was a city located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is talked about often in the Gospels, but is never mentioned in the Old Testament. However, after Jesus moved there, it became more common to read about it.

- Capernaum, as it turns out, was also the home of three disciples: Peter, Andrew and Matthew.
- Jesus taught in the synagogue there on several occasions

- It was also the site of several miracles. It was there:
 - That Jesus healed the centurion's son, the nobleman's son, Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and the paralytic.
 - That he cast out an unclean spirit, raised Jairus's daughter to life, and healed the woman with the bleeding issue.

Sadly, though, like so many of the cities and villages of the nation, the city of Capernaum heard and saw what Jesus did and said, yet they refused to believe. It would be among a handful of cities that would be singled out by Jesus as bad examples. He would eventually say:

And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. (Luke 10:15)

So Jesus was not welcome in either Capernaum or Nazareth because of the Gospel message He proclaimed.

The prophet Jeremiah had the same situation. Anathoth was his home town, and in the first reading for today you heard that the religious leaders of that city were plotting to assassinate him for preaching about God's coming judgment on that city. He too was forced to flee to somewhere else.

Two people, now living in a place that was not their home, because the people they knew best rejected the message they had to proclaim.

As you know the nation of Israel had a long history of disobedience to the expectations of God. Their on-again-off-again faithfulness eventually led them into an extended captivity at the hands of the Babylonians. They were carted off and forced to live in places that were not "home." And they got homesick. Listen to these words from Psalm 137:

Beside the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept as we thought of Jerusalem. We put away our harps, hanging them on the branches of poplar trees. (Psalm 137:1-2, NLT)

Sarcastically, their captors called out for them to sing. These captors were ridiculing the faith of God's people, demanding joyful hymns from these homesick captives;

"Sing us one of those songs about Jerusalem!" (Psalm 137:3, NLT)

The response of God's people was a sad one, one that offers us a good question about how we live in this current culture.

How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in this pagan land? (Psalm 137:4)

In a day and in a culture where the gospel message is increasingly unwelcome and more and more pagan, what motivates you to continue to sing the songs of the Lord? Three things:

#1: YOU DO IT BECAUSE GOD TELLS YOU TO DO IT

Jesus and Jeremiah were on a mission from God. They were under a divine compulsion to proclaim the good news.

- Jeremiah didn't want to do it, but he kept hearing God say, "Tell the people this." And so he did.
- Jesus was on board with God's plan. No reluctance there. He would proclaim his mission statement over and over again:

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

Why do you continue to sing?

#2: YOU DO IT BECAUSE IT IS PART OF YOUR HEART

Those captives in Babylon, sad though they were, knew they had to sing because God's songs were at the core of who they were. Listen to them!

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget how to play the harp. May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I fail to remember you, if I don't make Jerusalem my greatest joy. (Psalm 137:5-6)

Some times it takes a time a trial and stress to remind us of the things that are and should be at the core of who we are.

- Sometimes it is easier to become forgetful or nonchalant about the things of God when all is well.
- But when the Babylonians come, when the people around us pick up stones, or hurl ridicule our way, our memories return and our hearts catch fire.

And third ...

#3: YOU DO IT BECAUSE YOU KNOW GOD WILL WIN

Babylonians come and Babylonians go, but God is eternal. And God always wins. So on the banks of the rivers of Babylon, those captives prayed:

O Lord, remember what the Edomites did on the day the armies of Babylon captured Jerusalem. (Psalm 137:7)

And because God wins, we sing. Even when the victory hasn't come yet.

APPLICATION

Today is a day of singing, and playing, and hearing the songs of God. And we are rejoicing as we do.

- Rejoicing because we know that God's Grace Abounds in this congregation's gift and expression of music.

Throughout this month our church is celebrating God's Grace as it abounds throughout this congregation.

- You heard it two weeks ago as our youth led us in worship
- You heard it last week as we reminded ourselves of the work of discipleship.
- You will hear it next week as we celebrate how our congregation makes a difference in the lives of people it touches.
- But today we sing!

How could we ever keep silent when God's Grace Abounds?!!

Amen.