My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord of our Bodies, Hearts, Souls, and Spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight, our strength and our Redeemer, Amen.

We’re wrapping up our series on Transformations this week, and our scripture today is a fitting one, isn’t it? Jesus has been going around the countryside, teaching, healing, doing amazing and miraculous things—even praying to God and having a child raised from the dead. Remember that? With a single utterance—“little girl, I say to you, get up!” she was rejoined to her parents. It is this kind of spiritual transformation, from dead to alive, that we see over and over again when we’re in Jesus’ presence, and so our question today is…where are we?

Physically, emotionally, morally, spiritually, where are we right here, right now? Do we see or sense Jesus’ presence? Is he sitting there? Or there? Is he playing hide and seek back there? (gesturing) Or is he passing by outside, and we’re huddled in here, yet can’t go out and help others understand what we’ve seen and heard?

Jesus returns to his hometown in our scriptures. You know hometowns. Hometowns are just full of folks who remember us from when we were…well…not as capable as we are now. They remember a more innocent time, a gawky kid trying to figure it out, a youth who showed promise and accomplishment, or one that was sure to be trouble as the years rolled on.

And this is where Jesus finds himself in a bit of a quandary. Because he has grown in faith and wisdom, and he has been doing great things in God’s name, and here he is in the synagogue teaching wondrous truths. And yet the people respond in hometown fashion. “Oh, Jesus, c’mon. You say all this stuff and have been doing all these things…but that can’t be true. You’re not all that special, you’re the carpenter’s boy! Look, your brothers and sisters don’t go around claiming they know God’s will. They know when to shut up after reading the scrolls. What is WITH you, Jesus?”

He has come to be with those most familiar with him and a comfortable, safe space after being pressed to the flesh to the point where he can’t take it anymore. But instead of refuge, Jesus finds himself with a bunch of folks who aren’t amazed by him, but are on the cusp of calling him a liar and a blowhard for trying to upstage everyone else in Nazareth. The people are not offended by the miracles. No, not the healings at all. Their offense, astonishment, and unbelief, are all related to the fact that they just don’t accept that Jesus is telling them a new way, a new truth, a new path that leads to new life.

Now, the Gospel doesn’t say what the content of the teaching was. But I think we can assume that Jesus is not talking about Walleye recipes or trying to convince them the rope knots they used in their nets should be closer together or further apart. Mark’s Gospel focus is on the power and authority of Jesus’ words. And it is these words that can change lives—healing, turning around a life of pain, giving good news of God’s grace right here, right now. We heard this at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel didn’t we? Remember when Jesus was being baptized? The whole Gospel can be summed up like this: “Hear me people! The Kingdom of God is at hand (which means all you need is right here and now). Repent (which means turn around) and believe the Good News!”

These four things are said over and over. But these words are a reminder that when we give witness to these words, we, too, are met with unbelief. Especially from those who know us from long ago. Have you ever heard something like this: “Omigosh, Bible thumpin’? Really? We can still be friends, just don’t talk to me about God.”

It's a sober reminder that when we speak the Word that is Christ there is both offense, “Omigosh!”, and un-belief, “Don’t talk to me about God”. Somehow the Good News is received by many as bad news. And it may be received that way because folks most hostile to the Good News are the ones who need it very, very badly to repair their lives and those they touch. That’s modern demon-chasing, isn’t it? Trying to get folks to understand there is a better way of life than blame-shifting to others. And that God is here to help get that turn-around going, not send us to hell. God loves us even in our unbelief, but the Gospel is clear: we’ve lived in Greenland a long time. Folks remember us from way back when. They don’t believe that God makes things that much better, and especially when we try to say so for our lives and see them see it too. That can’t be possible.

That’s the bane of small town/home town. Our words may, in fact, have no power, and we can have comfort that Jesus faced these same circumstances. But Jesus didn’t stand still. He didn’t change the message either. He said we should continue on with new people who didn’t treat us that way, to welcome folks who would want to know more about that turn-around thing, and how to get a new start and new life. And Jesus, in giving his disciples these instructions, doesn’t say that we need to save up money and provisions and hunker down for a long time and be gone for months in far-off places.

Jesus says just let our words fall where they may. And the disciples are not to pronounce judgment on folks but just move on if things aren’t working out.

In church programmatics, that means we continue our broadcasts, continue to do public events, invite groups into our Parish Hall and Sanctuary, and let our words and deeds be witness to God’s love and grace. We will try things that don’t work out. Shake the dust off and go forward somewhere else. But don’t get the home-town doldrums. We are more than ordinary.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

Remember that the power is not in our image but in our witness, and our presence. We are no tied to what people think of us, or how they remember us. We have new life, new messaging, and always, power in God’s love. Today’s scripture reminds us that we are free. Free to show each other genuine care, forgiving freely. Free to help folks out with whom you have no relationship and don’t know, so you leave them grateful but maybe a little confused about why you did a kind thing. Free to talk about God’s love not just to one another but to those struggling in their lives, to know that the life of turning around is hard but we will be there with them.

For the power of God, our independence from the World, depends not just on our own belief, but our own witness and action with and to others. It doesn’t say we need to succeed; there will be far more encounters which fall flat than those that don’t. But for the ones that make a difference….well, now, that’s the healing we’re talking about here, isn’t it?

Let’s do more of that. Thanks be to God, Amen.