No place for being special?

July 9, 2006 (Proper 9, Year B)

2 Corinthians 12:2-10 Psalm 123 Mark 6:1-6

I can't believe that Yeshua had the chutzpa to show up in Nazareth. He comes walking into town as if he owned the place, though we haven't seen him in *years.* He's gotten older, and a little heavy around the middle…except he hasn't gotten any more mature: he still acts like a child -- a spoiled child, if you ask me. And I should know, since he's my brother.

So here comes Yeshua, with a couple dozen sycophants from all over Palestine, and they take over the synagogue. There were even some Greeks with him, from Deacapolis, who couldn't pronounce his name and kept calling him Jesus. He should be embarrassed, having those foreigners fawning over him.

Even the Jews that are with him are pretty sketchy –they're scruffy and homeless, most of them. Some of them look like they might have had leprosy, all of them dusty from the road. There are fishermen and beggars, even, lord almighty help us, tax collectors.

The women are even worse. What kind of woman goes walking around the countryside, without a father or husband? Well, I know what you call that kind of woman, but I won't use the word in polite company.

Now don't get me wrong. He used to be all right. He was a pretty good carpenter, and when we were young, he was a good older brother. He used to make clay birds for our little sisters. And when one of us was sad, or crying, or lonely or couldn't sleep, or was confused, or just bored – in fact, now that I think about it, almost all the time –he told us stories.

Wonderful stories. Little jokes, long tales, adventures and fantasies. He told us about the prophets and about the patriarchs, but he also told us stories with pagan kings and beggars and thieves and widows and strangers and judges, soldiers and magicians and scholars, priests and musicians, farmers and fishermen…

And everything was so *real* when we heard those stories. Our little brother Simon said that it was like a dream when Yeshua told stories -- but it wasn't, it was the opposite of a dream. When we heard him speak, it was like we *had* been sleeping but at the sound of his voice we had woken up and were seeing the world as if the Lord had just created it that morning.

Listen to me go on about him… I guess when we were all young, I really looked up to him. But I sure don't any more. He's still charming, but I'm an adult now, and I can't be tricked by fairy tales. None of us can. We're salt of the earth folks here in Nazareth, and we're not about to loose that saltiness because of some local yokel, even if he is my brother.

Like the sages say, nothing good can come out of Nazareth. We're not miracle workers, we're not scholars or prophets or healers. We're carpenters and farmers, fathers and grandfathers. We don't make trouble with the Romans, and we don't make trouble with Jerusalem. We certainly don't have any special wisdom. We don't do deeds of power -- we do hard, honest work. That's all we're good for.

We've heard about zealots who've tried to rise above their station, and we know what that gets you around here: If the

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synagogue doesn't run you out of town, the Romans will nail you to a cross, naked and shamed, dishonored even in death. Leave the miracles to the Greeks, the authority to Rome, and the preaching to Jerusalem.

Our brother Jude and my older sister Debora, they're too soft-hearted, and they listened to his stories all afternoon. Debora is certain she saw our brother heal Barabas, the one with the withered arm. She says that just last week, he raised a little girl to life, the 12-year old daughter of some old man named Jairus.

I told Debora that we sure didn't see any of that kind of power in the synagogue, with everyone snickering at all his puffed-up, so-called wisdom. He seemed pretty smart at first, until we remembered that he was one of us, a failed carpenter.

Debora just stamped her foot – she's got a temper like our mother's. "Oh, James. It's no wonder he didn't do any miracles," she told me,"with everyone glaring at him and shaking their heads. In an environment like that, what could he do? It's like the prophet Hoseah said,

> Because your sins are so many
> and your hostility so great,
> the prophet is considered a fool,
> the inspired man a maniac."

I replied to her from the book of Proverbs, "Like snow in summer or rain in harvest,
honor is not fitting for a fool." And then I reminder he that a woman had not place quoting scripture, and got out of the way before she could start yelling.

I suppose I kind of see what she's driving it – when I have to carve a table or a bench for someone, I can't have the customer staring over my shoulder and telling me that my lathe is no good and that my father was a better carpenter and that I picked out a poor piece of wood…

But this is our brother we're talking about, acting like a fool. What a shame for the whole family! He had to slink out of that synagogue. I wouldn't let him stay in the house. Unlike some people, I know what it means to honor my parents and family.

Tomorrow he says he is leaving, going to some of the neighboring villages to teach, or perform magic tricks, or whatever it is the charlatan does…

I hope the rest of the family has enough sense to stay put; sometimes I get worried Mom will get it into her head to follow him around – she still claims to talk with angels, after all, though I try to make sure the neighbors don't hear about it.

He shouldn't have left home in the first place. He should have stayed here with his own kind, in a community where we're all the same, where we can watch out for each other, keeping the Romans and the foreigners and the beggars away.

This is no place for being different, and no place for being special. This is no place at all for being special.

After the crucifixion and resurrection of his brother, James had a change of heart, a heartfelt conversion. Paul mentions that the risen Jesus appeared personally to James (1 Cor. 15:7), and James went on to become one of the great apostles, an apostle and martyr, and the first Bishop of Jersusalem, known as James the Just.

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