

Sunday, July 8, 2012: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Mark 6:1-13

by [Douglass Key](#) in the [June 27, 2012](#) issue

The GPS got us lost three times as my wife and I drove over the mountain trying to find a restaurant that our innkeepers called the best in the county. When we finally found the “town,” there was no town to speak of but only a bend in the road, a bridge, a couple of houses, a railroad trestle and an old general store. We later learned that it used to be a thriving town—before the flood of 1901 washed almost everything downstream.

I drove through the town and out the other end. No restaurant. I turned around and drove back down the hillside, looking more closely to the right and to the left. Still nothing except the houses and the run-down general store. But wait, the window of the store had “restaurant” painted on it. Really? I don’t know much about the restaurant business, but I know you have to have a certain amount of volume to maintain quality. This building looked abandoned. It hadn’t been painted since the flood—perhaps since Noah’s flood.

Maybe we had built up our expectations too high. While our son was away at camp we thought we would sneak away for a couple of nights in the mountains, eat a little good food and celebrate 20 years of marriage. Well, we decided, if a remodeled general store was the best the county had to offer, at least the company would be good even if the food was ordinary.

Sure enough, the walls were lined with shelves filled with reproductions and general merchandise from a bygone age. A waitress greeted us warmly and showed us to a table. Then we saw the menu. An 8-oz. locally sourced filet with chipotle butter and marinated onions; venison with kiwi puree and cremini mushrooms; lobster pot pie. In an old general store in the mountains? Who cooks like this out here? More puzzling, who eats like this out here?

That is what happens to the people of Nazareth when Jesus comes home for worship. They are, Mark says, astounded at how Jesus teaches. They are amazed at his reputation. But they know better than to trust that an ordinary person like Jesus could be the bringer of such powerful truth. This is not how they expected to hear God announce the arrival of the kingdom. This is not the agent of God’s redemption that they had been looking for. This is just Jesus. He is the son of the carpenter and the brother of other ordinary guys from right here in Nazareth. Jesus’ problem in Nazareth is that he doesn’t look remarkable enough. He is too common to be the Messiah. Too ordinary to be extraordinary.

Surely we will know the Messiah when we see him, they must have assumed. There’s no way God could send the promised deliverer among us and we would miss him. We know what we are looking for. It is all some of us think about. God has told us what the Messiah will do. We are very clear about this, and Jesus, from here in Nazareth, does not fit the bill.

Of course God could have sent a more conventional messiah to his people, one who would meet some of their expectations. They would have more easily believed a savior who was born to a well-connected family in Jerusalem, who was groomed for the role from a young age, who had institutional credentials. A scribe, maybe. A soldier, perhaps—someone well-versed in the law and politically connected.

But the arrival of a recognizable, conventional messiah would have made a very different story than the one lived by Jesus and his disciples. The redemption would have been very different as well. Far less radical. Far less audacious. Far less redemptive.

Only a conventional God could send a conventional messiah to redeem his people, and this is not a conventional God. This is the God of Abraham, the childless old man who would become the father of a great nation. This is the God of Shiphrah and Puah, the fearless midwives who thwarted Pharaoh's genocidal intentions. This is the God of David, the youngest who was out tending the sheep while his brothers were auditioning to be king. So this God's Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon.

Conventional wisdom says it can't be so, but we are witnesses of an unconventional truth.

This is very good news for you and me and the whole church because, in all in honesty, we do not strike a particularly imposing figure on the cultural landscape at present. We too are unlikely agents of God's redemptive purpose. Maybe we should embrace that reality instead of straining against it, for this God we serve has a history of accomplishing unconventional things through unconventional, unlikely, unexpected servants.