

Sunday Lesson – Jan 17, 2021

GOSPEL: Luke 4: 14-30

Sermon at Nazareth

Synopsis

“Back in Nazareth, Jesus sets out on his mission of deliverance, but his own townspeople in Nazareth reject him because of his vision for the salvation of all people everywhere, which includes the Gentiles.” *(Excerpts from provgroups.com/luke-414-30-jesus-rejected-in-nazareth-jan-31/)*

Insight

“Combining the two passages from Isaiah (61: 1-2a & 58:6) emphasizes this theme of "release" that characterizes Jesus' ministry. The same word appears elsewhere in Luke to describe people's release (usually translated "forgiveness") from sins. The word also appears frequently in Leviticus 25:8-55, which discusses the jubilee year, a "year of release" meant to preserve justice in Israel through the fair and regular distribution of wealth and personal freedoms. Jesus' sermon, therefore, implies that his ministry is one that liberates people from social and economic oppression, just as other pronouncements indicate that Jesus also frees people from sin's oppression. Later, in 4:24-29, Jesus provokes his audience by insisting that prophets suffer rejection in their homelands. Both Elijah and Elisha experienced this, and their ministries benefited unlikely outsiders such as the widow from Zarephath (1 Kings 17) and Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:1-19). The people of Nazareth, then, should expect no special benefits from Jesus because he is from their town. His ministry will benefit outsiders, the scorned, and the powerless. This enrages his audience, and their violence confirms Jesus' statement in 4:24.” *(Excerpts from enterthebible.org/resourcelink.aspx?rid=139)*



Gospel Reading

”Jesus returned to Galilee powerful in the Spirit. News that he was back spread through the countryside. He taught in their meeting places to everyone’s acclaim and pleasure. He came to Nazareth where he had been reared. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written, *God’s Spirit is on me; he’s chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, “This is God’s year to act!”* He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, “You’ve just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place.” All who were there, watching and listening, were surprised at how well he spoke. But they also said, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son, the one we’ve known since he was a youngster?” He answered, “I suppose you’re going to quote the proverb, ‘Doctor, go heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we heard you did in Capernaum.’ Well, let me tell you something: No prophet is ever welcomed in his hometown. Isn’t it a fact that there were many widows in Israel at the time of Elijah during that three and a half years of drought when famine devastated the land, but the only widow to whom Elijah was sent was in Sarepta in Sidon? And there were many lepers in Israel at the time of the prophet Elisha but the only one cleansed was Naaman the Syrian.” That set everyone in the meeting place seething with anger. They threw him out, banishing him from the village, then took him to a mountain cliff at the edge of the village to throw him to his doom, but he gave them the slip and was on his way.” *The Message*

What It Could Mean?

“The scripture reading that Jesus chooses speaks of healing and freedom and favor. Jesus even leaves off Isaiah’s mention of a “year of vengeance.” Comfort, rather than fear, seems the order of the day. And all is well. But then the sermon takes a turn. As if Jesus’ proclamation of fulfillment was a dividing edge, he follows Isaiah’s promises with challenges to his listeners’ hometown expectations. God’s year of favor does not privilege home or country, and God’s people are not always playing the roles they expected to play. As in so many of Luke’s reversals, “What Jesus tells his audience is that they, who had every reason to believe that they were in, are out, just as the many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, and the many lepers in the time of Elisha, were out.”

Proclaiming good news to the poor often means proclaiming discomfiting news to the comfortable. To use a contemporary example, telling a white congregation that God will not turn a blind eye to white supremacy may challenge silent privilege in ways that evoke anger—but it is still good news. More than this, it is freeing news, if it can be heard.

And this brings up a second question about this passage that gives me pause. The Spirit is present, the Word is proclaimed, and Jesus announces the scripture’s fulfillment “in your hearing” (verse 21). Yet, the congregation allows rage to harden its heart to the point of violence. Jesus nearly loses his life. What is the meaning of that word—“hearing”? Does it require something more than being present in the moment? Was it meant to make Jesus’ good news conditional—fulfilled only if a congregation was ready to receive it in all of its complexity?

His listeners do not have their eyes opened in this passage. They remain spiritually ignorant. In what way was this scripture fulfilled? It is a question that may hit too close for preachers who have forged their way through the difficult year of 2020.

But I think the ambiguity around Jesus’ proclamation of fulfillment leaves open another possibility: that he means just what he says. In spite of all appearances, in spite of hard hearts and violent mobs, Jesus has shown up with good news—regardless of whether it is received. The first three lines of Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah 61 end with the word “me”—which, in the context of Luke, focuses attention on Jesus’ person. It’s Jesus’ presence that makes a sermon a sermon, not the congregation’s response. And by the power of the Spirit, Jesus continues to proclaim release, recovery, and favor in ordinary communities, through ordinary preachers “today.”

Luke 4 places the congregation on a razor’s edge of decision: where do they stand in the story? Do they celebrate the wideness of God’s mercy—or would they trade God’s good news for a good news of their own design? Luke 4 also proclaims the mystery of faith: the scripture has been fulfilled. Ready or not. And come cliff or come cross, it will not be stopped.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Matthew 13: 54-58 & Mark 6: 1-6](#) *Matthew & Mark versions*
- [Isaiah 61: 1-2 & 58: 6](#) *Jesus quoting scripture in temple*
- [Romans 3:10/7:18/9:18/9:20](#) *None are righteous*

Thought for the Day

“Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows; it empties today of its strength.” ~ *Corrie Ten Boom*

A Prayer

God of the nations, show us how to love all the people of the earth, of all colors and kinds: those with technology and without; those who make due with very little and who use many resources; those with formal education and without; those who call upon your name and who do not; so that all your children may be glorified in the name of the One who brought glory and liberty, Jesus Christ our salvation. **Amen**