

Sunday Lesson – January 30, 2022

GOSPEL: Luke 4: 21-30

“The Lord’s Favor Doesn’t Play Favorites”



Context

“In this passage Jesus picks a fight with the congregation in his old home town and almost suffers a premature demise because of it. The form of the saying is a pronouncement. It is therefore a correction. Jesus feels compelled to correct the thinking of the congregation, and, by extension, the reader. It is often the assumption of the listener that is most in need of correction; the unexamined, seemingly obvious “truth” that the individual and the community never bother to question.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org, Revised Common Lectionary, by Roy Harrisville III, 2010)*

Insight

“Jesus knows they’d like more than just to **hear** about these things. They’d like to see some of his best work, too, which is why he kind of teases them with that old proverb, “Doctor, cure yourself.” That’s why he says what he knows they’re all thinking, “Jesus, do something for **us**— your hometown family and friends – like we’ve heard you’ve been doing out there in the world. Release some captives, **here**. Heal some of **us** who are sick. Give some of that Lord’s favor to those of us who know you best, now that you’re home. If you’re doing it for them, surely you can do it for us, too.”

But Jesus reminds them that this “Lord’s favor” the prophets spoke of wasn’t about playing favorites. The Lord’s favor, isn’t about playing favorites.

And Jesus’ homies lose their ever-loving, God-blessed minds. “You mean this grace and favor and recovery and release stuff isn’t just for us?!” “You mean we aren’t supposed to look out for number one?!?” “You mean we don’t take care of our own, first, and then – with the left-overs – pick and choose who we think

might be worthy?!?!?” “You mean this ‘recovery’ and ‘release’ and ‘freedom’ is for **them**, as much as it is for us?”

So, for Jesus to proclaim grace to lepers and widows was a pretty big deal. But that wasn’t all. Not only was he talking about the outcast, the sinner, the shamed and the shameful, he was talking about people outside of the Jewish circle. Jesus was saying that, just like the prophets Elijah and Elisha had showed, **foreigners** to Israel were welcome to the grace of God, too. Not only was God’s grace for losers – like lepers and widows – but it was even for (and especially for) **Gentile** widows and **Gentile** lepers, to boot. Which seems to imply that there wasn’t anyone beyond the reach of God’s love, or beyond the reach of his own ministry, as a result.” *(Excerpts from crossofgrace.org/sermonblog/2016/2/1/-luke-421-30)*

Gospel Reading

“He came to Nazareth where he had been raised. 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 time to shine!”

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 just a kid?” 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?

“In Luke 4:21, Jesus takes the next step beyond simply quoting and reading the Isaiah scroll. Jesus connects what he reads to the current moment of the community. Jesus interprets the meaning and significance of the Isaiah prophesy, pointing them towards where to look and he sits among them to entertain the questions that follow. In short, an important model established in today’s passage is reading and interpreting scripture **in community** and **with community**.

Before the same synagogue members rejected Jesus’ words, they accepted and affirmed them. After Jesus read and interpreted the prophecy as fulfilled, his listeners approved his message and wanted to understand more about it and him.

What changed between verses 22 and 28, prompting the shift from amazement (*thaumazō*) to anger (*thumos*)? The offense that sparks rage and violent backlash is Jesus’ refusal to act on his authority and power in his hometown. The issue here is deeds, not belief.

In Luke 4:16-30, the gospel writer leverages the paradigm of the prophet. In addition to teacher and interpreter, Jesus is cast as a prophetic figure who resources the traditions of the

prophets. The figure of the prophet is a prominent theme across the Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts (Luke 7:16; 7:39; 13:31-33; 24:19; Acts 3:22; 7:37). The response to prophetic messengers in Luke-Acts is mixed. At times, the messages they carry, particularly as interpreted through Scripture, are welcomed and affirmed. Other times, they meet resistance. Jesus’ prophetic proclamation and embodiment coupled with the shifting responses he receives in this story, epitomizes the pattern of prophetic disclosure unfolding throughout the larger narrative.

Disclosure and recognition in Luke, therefore, involves identifying the continuities and symmetries between what God is doing and what God already accomplished through earlier prophets. Today’s passage is an invitation to follow Jesus’ example and to rehearse the prophets of our cultures and traditions that extend Jesus’ liberating message of freedom, provision, care, and recovery (4:18-19).” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org, Revised Common Lectionary, by Shively Smith)*

Readings for Further Study

- [2 Chronicles 36:16; Jeremiah 2:30; Amos 2:12; Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34; 1 Thessalonians 2:15; Hebrews 11:32](#) *Israel has long history of rejecting prophets*
- [1 Kings 17:14](#) *God sent Elijah to the widow Zarephath*
- [2 Kings 5: 1-14](#) *Elisha cleansed the leper Gentile named Naaman*

Thought for the Day

“Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time.” ~ Oswald Chambers

A Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and love; and that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**