

“Unpredictable Word”

Luke 4:21-30

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Let us pray: Gracious God, God of truth, we welcome you in our midst.

Not only for ourselves but for those who are around us.

Give us the courage to speak boldly in a world that hides behind words.

And may your Spirit guide us this morning through your Holy Word. Amen

There is something special about returning to the places where we grew up. Most likely, people are happy to see you. They are eager to hear about your life, your achievements; perhaps, they even celebrate us. But there is a part of them that cannot see you passed the fact that you are “John’s son” or “Martha’s daughter.” They return to that place, even if, unconsciously, when you were that little girl or boy down the street. They remember things about you that you would rather forget.

This morning’s sermon is a continuation of last week’s sermon. Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth. He is surrounded by people who knew him. He goes to the Synagogue. And, he reads from the book of Isaiah:

“The spirit of the Lord in upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

He then announces- “today, this scripture has been fulfilled.”

So, when people heard him, they were impressed. They spoke well about him; in fact, it was a beautiful scene. And, then there was a question:

Isn’t this the son of Joseph?

The scene changes. Jesus reacts in an unexpectedly and says, “No doubt you’ll quote me the old proverb. ‘Physician heal thyself.’ He goes into projecting their expectations of him, and he basically says, “Back off.”

So, what got into Jesus? Where did that come from? Because, the truth is, and I hate to say this, that Jesus picked a fight.

There is much speculation around this passage. Did he hear a challenge in their question: “*Just Joseph’s son?*” Does he feel they would have such self interest and they will abuse him as a healer? Was Jesus in a bad mood? The reality is that we cannot say for sure. But, I suspect that Jesus, deep down, knew what they were all about. And, he does the most difficult thing to do to any human being: He told them the truth.

He told the truth about their inner motivations -- motivations that, perhaps, they themselves were not aware of as of yet. Perhaps it is accurate to say that Jesus brought light into their shadow. And it is for certain, that Jesus’ response was unpredictable and shocking. So, they want him gone.

We have all heard that “familiarity breathes contempt.” *The complacent familiarity about Jesus will not do.* He is trying to wrestle out of them their complacent opinions. Incidents like this challenge some belief about Jesus being meek and mild. Here we have an “in your face” Jesus. Here we see a Jesus that is focused of fulfilling the kingdom of God, not the expectations by popular opinion.

Some have call this the “Nazareth Syndrome.” Others have equated this incident with the “Hometown Syndrome.” Because it is possible that we become preoccupied with our own corner of the world, we can assume that the only work God is really doing it involves us, in our local context; that renewal of the saints is more important that than new proclamation of the good news to the lost. Perhaps the “Nazareth Syndrome” or the “Hometown Syndrome” -- “it is expressed in a willingness to settle for security, rather than risk everything for the Kingdom.”¹

We have heard about telling it like it is. How do we feel about hearing it like it is? And, hearing it like it is may be a confrontational experience. Marcos Arias writes about the Kingdom of God and says,

*The arrival of the kingdom produces a crisis. It is like **a seed** forcing its way upward through the soil, stones, and thistles of this world. It is like the **new wine** which ferments inside the old windskins, increases the inner pressure, and forces its way out to the bursting point. It is like a new patch in old cloth which tears away and makes the hole worse than ever. It is like **fire** that has been kindled over the earth; who can stop it? It is like **a sword** that draws a dividing line and cuts through the most intimate and sacred relationships and loyalties, and subordinates any former value or commitment.*²

¹ Dennis Bratcher Copyright ©2013 CRI/Voice, Institute

² Announcing the Reign of God, Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus, pg 42-43

So, when Jesus tells us the truth about ourselves, we die. But when Jesus goes on to show us what that truth is all about, we come alive again. We come alive in the Spirit of God to be an instrument of God's peace; to also proclaim the good news, proclaim release to the captives, helping the blind regain sight. and setting the oppressed free.

Yes Jesus knows that no prophet is accepted in her or his own hometown. However, here is a promise of epic proportion...God is near. God is revealing God's very self; yet ,we know that God is not being perceived.

So, what has changed? We heard the truth and the truth was provoking; the truth caused a reaction in the crowd in Nazareth that led to the attempt on taking Jesus' life. But, do you think that Jesus' words would have gone any better today?

Jesus went to Nazareth and shocked everyone with his words. Because there are incidents that happen, and they rock our world. They stop us in our tracks. They shake the foundation of our core believes, and they challenge our complacency. I think it is fair to say that the events at Newtown have made our lives in this state, and our own lives, feel out of control. But, yet, we live in a nation that is conflicted in whether millionaires should have their taxes raised, and whether it is fair to make sure that everyone who buys a gun has a criminal check. So, I doubt that much has changed; because although the events of our world may shake our foundation, our desire for normalcy may be more valuable than the need for change.

So, we bring our ruined hope, our insecurities, our uncertainty to the first cliff we can find, so that once we push them off the precipice, we might secure a sense of comfort, our false sense of safety, and our familiarity. We are often eager to face the future, but only if the future is the same as the past.

Is it possible to live for the future so intently that we miss the day of the Lord when it arrives in our midst? Is it possible to look into the future so deeply that we might miss that the time of liberation and healing is here? We might miss Jesus in our midst, because his Word might be too hard to hear.

So Jesus speaks truth into our lives and it challenges us, the church, to regain our prophetic voice -- to be a church with a radical message. It invites us to seize the opportunity to experience the kingdom of God *now*. It invites us to look beyond ourselves, and to know that God is so much more than the God who meets our needs. God is inviting us to proclaim the year of God's favor. Perhaps God is

leading us to enter a ministry of annunciation: To announce God's truth, the Kingdom of God, as the kingdom of hope in a world that is suffering from hopelessness.

God is inviting us too, to speak the truth and to stand for justice, even if that means that we would be pushed toward the precipice of rejection and judgment.

May the God of truth, love, and transformation challenge our walls of resistance and our lukewarm postures on justice; and may God lead us toward courage, determination, peace, and hope. Amen.