

Weekend of Sunday, February 3, 2019
4th Sunday after the Epiphany/Lectionary 4/Proper 4/Year C
Primary Text: Luke 4:21-30
Sermon Title: “A Holy Disturbance!”

Theme

People in Jesus’ hometown are initially pleased when he says that God will free the oppressed. Their pleasure turns to rage when he reminds them that God’s prophetic mission typically pushes beyond human boundaries so that mercy and healing are extended to those regarded as outsiders.

Text

²¹Then [Jesus] began to say to [all in the synagogue in Nazareth,] “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” ²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Sermon

Today's Gospel Reading begins with the last verse of last week's Gospel Reading. You will recall that after his baptism by John, Jesus went into the desert for forty days where he was tempted by the devil himself. And upon withstanding the devil's worst, Luke wrote

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

And then, in last week's Gospel reading, Jesus went to his own hometown of Nazareth, and initially was welcomed as an itinerant rabbi when they gave him to honor of reading and expounding on scripture. You will recall that he read from the prophet Isaiah, sat down, the traditional posture of the rabbi, and then preached a nine-word sermon;

^{21b}“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

After this, Luke added,

²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

Jesus should have taken his final bow and went to his mother's house for dinner. How things would have turned out differently had he done that.

What happened next might look disturbing to us. Though his townsfolk were complimentary, Jesus intentionally chose to take up conversation in a provocative manner.

You see, what we have here is Luke's first reference to Jesus demonstrating that unique gift he had for looking through the exterior of a person to see the heart of the person; what was really going on in their heart and soul; in the very depths of their being. And when he did that, he exposed what he saw.

³He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’

In other words, he could tell that though they were complimentary on the surface, in their minds they were thinking, "This dude is a wack-job, he needs a doctor alright, he needs a psychologist!"

Luke had previously recorded that a report about him and his preaching and teaching and performing of signs and miracles had spread throughout the surrounding country. Jesus must have sensed that others just turned out to see the show – to see if he could really do the tricks that they had heard about, and so he said to them,

^{23b}"And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'"

Here is my point: I believe that in his own hometown he saw that his own townsfolk were faithless spiritual spectators.

It is Super Bowl Sunday and people, like me, who are neither Patriot nor Ram fans will watch the Super Bowl. I never play organized football in my youth. Though I love Ohio State football, I don't really watch very much NFL football, and yet I will watch, and likely yell at what I feel are terrible play calls and wonder how passes could be dropped. No one should listen to me at all because I don't know what I am talking about. I am merely a Super Bowl spectator.

Perhaps in the same way, Jesus saw in his townsfolk, a bunch of faithless spiritual spectators, people who called themselves Jews, and by that they meant both their ethnicity and also their spiritual alignment, but they really had no faith at all.

Two stories will help me make the point. The first I am sure I told you recently in the Daily Word. While on internship at Faith Lutheran Church in Arlington Virginia, a guy called the church one day and asked me if we had any noteworthy figures among the church's membership, especially military personnel serving at the Pentagon, which was just down the road. As the conversation unfolded, I learned that the guy had recently been discharged from military service and wanted to make the defense industry a career. And so he wanted to join a church that would help him advance his career. He actually told me that he really didn't have any spiritual belief system, he just wanted to build his career.

And the second story happened a year later during my senior year at seminary when my home congregation in Jackson, Michigan wanted me to take the call to be their pastor, because "You know us and know what and how we do things, and nothing will have to change." Well, I was completing a four-year education to become a pastor, and the last thing I wanted was to be saddled with doing what was always done without regard to a new interpretation to pastoral leadership. It is true what Jesus said, ²⁴ "no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown."

Sometimes what is needed to move people from where they are to where they need to be is a *holy disturbance*.

Truth is, though I told that young man seeking to advance his career that I thought his intention was misguided, I still invited him to church, not to meet our who's who of military brass, but to meet Jesus, the king of the universe.

And while I respectfully refused an invitation to enter the call process with St. James Lutheran Church in Jackson Michigan, I encouraged them to seek a candidate that would shake them up, for Christ's sake, because a little Lutheran church can become a social club only meeting the needs of its members, rather than a Christ-centered outpost for mission and ministry.

You see, I believe that Jesus observed his own townsfolk as faithless spiritual spectators, and made the call to create a holy disturbance, to get them passionate about something, even if it was to kill him.

Did that holy disturbance cause the Nazarenes to come to faith? I don't know, Nazareth is never mentioned again in Luke's Gospel nor any of the other three Gospels except in reference to Jesus as 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

Did they, the Nazarenes miss out on the best thing that ever happened to them? Perhaps, I don't know. But that question applied to us is my Raisin' the Bar Challenge for you this week.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

No judgement from me here, but how would you describe your life of faith? Do you just show up for worship, perform the Lutheran aerobics of standing and sitting at the right time, mouth some words of the liturgy, throw a few bucks in the plate

and leave feeling good about yourself that you got your ticket punched? If this describes you then you might just be a faithless spiritual spectator.

If I have described you then I would like to challenge you to get up off the bench and get in the game. Maybe what you need is a holy disturbance, something that will provoke you to examine your own heart and soul, the very depths of your being, and see if there is something there that you would be happy for Jesus to see, or if there is something there that you hope no one, especially Jesus, ever sees.

Saturday conclusion:

Now, unlike the presence of Jesus in Nazareth, our opportunity to grow in faith and love with him is not a once and gone experience. He is waiting become known by us in ways we can only imagine now, but can also be realized now. Seek him with all your heart.

Sunday conclusion:

Now, unlike the presence of Jesus in Nazareth, our opportunity to grow in faith, hope, and love with him is not a once and gone experience. He is with us now, and has called me to publish glad tidings that in Jesus Christ we can have real peace, redemption and release.

Prayer

Savior seeking a deeper relationship with us, loving Jesus, provoke us to desire more of you. Provoke us to desire to grow in faith, hope, and love so that we will not miss out on the promise of your salvation. We pray this in your name. Amen