

Knowing Jesus In Epiphany – We Are His
Luke 4:21-30
Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany
February 3, 2019
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Luke 4:21-30 (NRSV)

²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³ He 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.’” ²⁴ And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵ But 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; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers^[a] in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They 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. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

We started discussing this particular part of Luke’s gospel last Sunday.

Today’s part is how it ends.

Like the first sign a couple weeks ago, THIS can be considered Jesus’ first sermon, in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth.

It hasn’t been a long time since his baptism and word has spread about all the things he had been doing and people are amazed.

Can’t you just see the headlines? “Hometown Boy Makes Good!”

But: just when we’d think things are well those same “things” take a turn from good to bad...even *really* bad!

The listeners at the synagogue want to throw Jesus over a cliff to get rid of a *trouble maker!* But WHY???

One commentary I read put forth THIS premise: they all wanted a piece of him and his power.

That seems fair enough, who wouldn't, but then I wonder what good is throwing your money-making-headliner over the cliff?

And regretfully, don't we want the same kind of miracles in our lives? Maybe not (necessarily)– water turned into wine, lame able to walk, the blind having sight, but we could get on board with some good things: renewed health and increased wealth. You know, a bit of everything.

We should be convicted, really, of wanting those same things.
We're faithful, so why can't we get into that action?

The people at the synagogue that day felt they deserved *at least* a cut. Hadn't they contributed some to his upbringing? They people might have been thinking: "I go to synagogue faithfully every week. And I study God's word daily. I pray morning, noon, and night? What's *in it for me?*"

They really felt proud when they hear others talk about "little Jesus all grown up and doing incredible things; he's a hometown hero!"

But, bottom line: they don't want to share *their privileges* with outsiders.

Don't we do that? Claim Jesus *just for us?*

We come back here every Sabbath (in our case Sunday) and call on his name in our prayers and, today, we're gonna take Holy Communion with the "body and blood of Christ" – don't **we** claim him as OUR own, too?

However, Jesus knows what his audience is thinking before they even say it. And he challenges their assumptions (you know what trouble ASSUMPTIONS can get us into!)

Jesus, even though he's in the midst of what is his FIRST hostile environment, takes the time and effort to remind the folks that God works differently.

This is just the start of Jesus turning the world upside down with his ministry!

God's power, he tells them, often uses strangers and outsiders to get their (OUR) attention.

Kim read for us that Jesus reminded them (and US looking in) that the prophet Elijah was sent, out of *his comfort zone*, to a widow in foreign Zarephath and that Elisha, who followed Elijah, cleansed a leper in Syria! Both places were outside the boundaries of Israel.

Gasp and egads!

And we know, 'cause we paid attention in Sunday school, that Jesus met with a Samaritan woman and talked about the man in the ditch being ministered to by a Samaritan?

Who else? What other Gentiles, did Jesus use to make a point about the Kingdom of God?

Jesus reminds us that God ***has always*** looked out for those in need – EVEN THOSE beyond the community of faith or beyond the boundaries of our towns.

It's not OUR power. It's God's power!

And, God is not ours. It's the other way around: we are his.

The hearers at the synagogue didn't want to be reminded of the stories they'd heard over and over from the scrolls of the prophets.

Huh.

Nope. They want to run him out of town.

Tar and feather him.

PUSH HIM off a cliff and leave him there to die.

No more listening TO THIS!

Push him over and shut. Him. Up.

If you haven't been downstairs for a while, you should go down and see Rachel's mural again. She did a wonderful job depicting a hill outside the city walls. You'll see (and recall) that often at the bottom of those town cliffs was a garbage dump. Nice, huh?

The disgruntled people in Nazareth want to hurl him over, into the garbage that is probably burning down there.

Yet somehow, he manages to get away.

I envision that capability as the opposite of when he just “appeared” after his resurrection, in the Upper room.

Jesus escapes, he has to - all because they really didn’t hear him or weren’t really listening, in the first place.

Our lectionary suspects we have missed it, too, which is probably why we get this story two Sundays in a row.

Jesus said, *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

“This scripture” as I mentioned last week, is from Isaiah chapter 61, where the prophet proclaims God’s care and changes of fortune for the oppressed and blind; for all those in need.

Now, the word we need to pay attention to is **“all.”**

And that’s the word that honked off the people in Nazareth.

They didn’t want share God or God’s care **with “all.”**

“God’s care is ours.

This Jesus is ours.”

They don’t want to hear about a God who cares about foreigners and outsiders.

“We want God’s power and care right here in Nazareth and Nazareth only. He’s one of us. He’s ours.”

We should be convicted, that sometimes shut ourselves away from others rather than sharing the privileges **we’ve** been GIVEN (hear that – **we’ve been given.**)

They REALLY miss what Jesus said.

And WE CAN’T, DEAR ONES!

“This scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Rather than throwing a “prophet in his own town” off a cliff, we (like them) need to HEAR.

And our hearing should result in us caring for strangers and those “gentiles” from outside our safe zones INSIDE the church.

Hear and listen!

Our hearing of these words from GOD’S Word should result in our doing the work Jesus did and continues to do THROUGH us.

Jesus reminded them, and he reminds us, that as covenant partners with God, (something that was put in place way back in the Exodus wilderness,) we are appointed and anointed by God to live in such a way that others can see and hear that we are living out God’s demonstration of a community of faith, hope, and charity (Paul would say “love”) for **all** people.

Bottom line, what Jesus is saying with his preaching is, in effect,

“Get with it.

Bind up the brokenhearted.

Give hope to those without vision – literal or figurative vision.

Liberate the oppressed.

Release people from their debts.

God has given you the vision of the Year of the Lord’s Favor so live that kind of life.

You are already God’s people called to do God’s work, just like me,” Jesus says.

But he’s also saying,

“Don’t think that just because you’re faithful and in covenant with God that you have some kind of lock on God’s power.

You do **only in the sense** that you give that power to others. Real others, like Syrians and Zarephathians and all sorts of strange ‘others’ outside of our little community.”

See, our God is not a God who lives only in Israel...or the U.S....only in the Christian tradition or our denomination, or whatever boundaries we wanna set.

God is not ours.

Jesus is not ours.

We are His.

And we are to go beyond the boundaries we set - just like Elijah, Elisha, and others did.

God calls us to work where and when God pleases.

If the scripture is to be fulfilled, it must be in our hearing it...

...in our embodying it and acting upon it – literally, our **being** it.

To become the fulfillment of the Word of God, **we need** to let go of all ideas that Jesus, “the hometown kid,” is ours and only ours, and figure out what it means that “we are His.”

It’s another way of “Knowing Jesus in Epiphany.”

THIS WORD IS ALIVE.

What he said that day in Nazareth is just as true today.

Let’s live what Isaiah proclaimed.

God will see to it that we are blessed and we can be glad that the Spirit of the Lord has anointed us so that the world (yep, even the outsiders) will see that the Good News of Christ shines through all that we say and do.

Amen.

To Holy Communion.