

A Sermon Preached by Pastor Justin Johnson
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church Bellingham, WA
4th Sunday after Epiphany January 31, 2010
Text: Luke 4:14-30

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and from Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:21

The hometown boy is winning the crowd. He has good things to say. You can almost hear the people saying, “Preach it son!” Obviously not a Lutheran church.

Jesus has just done something that he has probably done many times before. He is in his hometown of Nazareth, where he grew up. It would have been part of the process of learning the Jewish faith. One would go to the synagogue and listen to others read the sacred writings and then listen to what people would have to say about them. Eventually as one grew older and wiser, he would also take his turn standing and reading and then sitting down to say a few words about the reading. But Jesus would have been expected to say what others before him had to say about the reading. And he probably did just that many times, but today in our gospel reading, it was different.

Jesus takes the scroll and he stands up and he reads from Isaiah. He reads, “The Spirit of the Lord is 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 and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of Jubilee.”

After reading this, Jesus rolls up the scroll, hands it to the scroll boy, sits down, and says this: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Ah, the people are pleased at this. And all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is this not Joseph's son?”

When I hear this, I hear part amazement, and I hear part pride. The amazement part is that this is Joseph's son, the carpenter's son, and I would

have never guessed. The pride part that I hear has to do with it being one of their own. This is Joseph's son. He is one of us.

I mean, imagine if Michael Cozad or Cole Bellingar were to walk in here today and read scripture and then say something profound about it. There would be amazement and pride. Is this not Jim's son... is this not Karen's son?

But the encounter with Jesus does not end there. It does not end with the townspeople gushing in amazement over Joseph's son and his gracious words. No, the encounter ends with the townspeople attempting to run Jesus out of town and to hurl him off of a cliff.

What happens that moves the people from being in amazement over his gracious words to wanting to hurl him off of a cliff?

Well, Jesus picks a fight. It kind of ruins the meek and mild image of Jesus that gets portrayed.

How does Jesus pick a fight? First, he puts words in their mouths. He said, "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 that you did at Capernaum."

Then Jesus tells them why he will not do such, because, "No prophet is acceptable in the prophet's hometown." He then tells two stories of prophets being sent to outsiders. Not just any two prophets, but the greatest two prophets of Israel: Elijah and Elisha.

You might recall that Elijah was the prophet that took on the 450 prophets of Baal and won in spectacular fashion as the Lord sent fire down on his water-soaked sacrifice that consumed everything, even the water. Yet the story Jesus chooses to tell about Elijah is when he is sent to the widow at Zarephath in Sidon, an outsider.

Elisha was Elijah's successor. Elisha purified water for the people of Israel in the city of Jericho (II Kings 2), yet Jesus does not tell this story, but he tells of how Elisha cleansed Naaman the Syrian of leprosy, an outsider, but did not cleanse any lepers in Israel.

Jesus is implying that he, too, will do great things for outsiders, but not for his own people. But this is not because he does not want to do them for his own, but because they will not accept him as a prophet, or rather they will not accept him as the Son of God. He is Joseph's son. They presume to know who he is.

The people are upset. Jesus has struck a nerve. It is all well and good that good news is proclaimed to them, but here Jesus is saying that the good news is for all people, not just Jews, it is for Gentiles as well. And this upsets the people. For they want to be the favored ones exclusively. They want to be the insiders. They want to have the inside track, but Jesus shatters that in an instant.

Now, we may sit here and think, "Those poor people in Jesus' hometown. They just didn't get it. I am glad that I am not like that." Maybe it is family members, maybe it is a neighbor or a co-worker, maybe it is a political party, maybe it is a country--whoever it is whether it is an individual or a group of people, we all have someone that it would just absolutely push our buttons if we saw someone telling them of God's love for them in Jesus Christ and they believed it. I mean, what if my neighbor, a proclaimed atheist, started coming to church and understood that God's love was for him. That would totally screw up my world. Who would it be for you?

Maybe God is calling **you** to be the person that brings good news to them or proclaims release to the captive, or helps the blind to see, or works for the oppressed to go free. No. Probably not. You are right, God probably just wants you to keep to yourself. (Note sarcasm.) God would not want your world to be upset.

The truth is, that is the work of God in our world in Jesus Christ. For he comes upsetting what is. He comes bringing good news to the poor and proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of Jubilee. And Jesus comes for you and for me announcing our sins are forgiven and raising the dead to new life. But this good news in Jesus often upsets our lives. It takes what once was certain death and declares that it no longer has the final word. It takes what weighs the heart down with shame and guilt—sin--and declares it forgiven. And this good news is not just for the insiders, for in Jesus Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, insider or outsider, slave or free, male or female. But in Jesus Christ, the good news is for all people.

Whether we like it or not, whether we speak well of Jesus, or want to drive him off of a cliff, he pushes us, challenges us, upsets our worlds, and calls us into a new future that he has prepared for us and for all people.

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. For that is the power of the word of God. It does what it says. Thanks be to God. Amen.