

Luke 4:21-30

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 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?" 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.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 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; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 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. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.*

Making Waves - January 30, 2022

Luke 4:21-30

All of us have occasion to work with children and young people. Most of us have had the opportunity to be parents. If we haven't be parents, then we have been uncles or aunts or cousins. For some, we have professionally been involved with young people as teachers, health care workers, or as sports or academic coaches.

In addition to my own children, I have a number of nieces and nephews. I teach at an elementary school. As pastor, I work with our children and youth for the Christian Education. I don't know about you, but I try to look at each of these young people not only from the standpoint of who they are right now, but what they might become in the future.

I think we all get imaginative about the future of young people, don't we? We watch a girl make a perfect layup in basketball and ch-ching, maybe there's a sports scholarship in her future. We listen to a boy recite his opinion essay in class and think that maybe he can be a lawyer. Let's face it, we all love to glory in the achievements of the young people in our lives. Nowadays, you can get a group of grandmas together and they are all taking out their smartphones, showing photos and playing videos. I expect it was the opportunity for grandparents to see more pictures of their kids and chat with them via FaceTime that spurred them to take the plunge and learn this new technology.

Each of us, in our own way, wants the best for our young people. We may have a tendency to project our own dreams on them. We may encourage them, both deliberately and inadvertently, to do and try things we ourselves did not do in our own lives. Every baby has potential, potential to do things which we cannot even imagine. That attitude is a basic part of being human and certainly, when hometown boy Jesus took the stage in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth 2000 years ago, all the hopes and dreams of his family, neighbors, and friends, were on his shoulders.

Last week, we discussed how Jesus gave his hometown his mission statement, quoting from the words of the prophet Isaiah. "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, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Now last week I didn't really dive into to analyzing these words. My point was that Jesus rooted his mission statement in scripture. The Bible was, of course, the foundation for everything he did and throughout history, the Bible is the foundation for every work that has advanced human rights and justice for all.

However, in our passage today, Jesus explains what he means by quoting Isaiah's words, Yet far from winning the approval of his hometown, he gets them angry — so angry that they want to throw him off a cliff!

How could Jesus go from hometown hero, the golden child, to the object of intense anger and hatred in just a few minutes? He did it, as all troublemakers have done, by telling his hometown the truth. And, just as we are seeing today in our own nation, there are many people who simply do not want to hear the truth and cling to their own fantasies of right and wrong.

Each of us in our own minds has a picture of the way the world ought to work, don't we? Whether you are liberal or conservative, interested in politics or not, you have a particular world view. We use our individual world views to judge each other, don't we? Let's face it, we gravitate toward people whose ideas are similar to our own. Those who have taken the COVID vaccination, for example, have a hard time understanding the anti-vaxxers. I mean, the vaccinated population says, why would anyone refuse something which can save their lives? Why would anyone want to expose their families, friends, and co-workers to a terrible disease?

On the other hand, the unvaccinated are equally incredulous at those who trust the government, think COVID is real, and would so quickly give up their freedom. No one can tell me what to do!

Obviously as someone who is fully vaccinated and boosted, I have a hard time understanding the other side. Nonetheless, nearly one-third of our fellow Americans subscribe to a world view which is different from mine and such a significant minority cannot be ignored.

On that day in Nazareth, before the hometown crowd who was so proud of their boy, Jesus challenged the world-view of his community and got them enraged. What did he say that turned him from hero to zero?

Jesus was Jewish, speaking in a Jewish synagogue to his Jewish friends and neighbors. For Jews, one of their essential beliefs was that they were God's exclusively chosen people. An unshakable article of faith was that they held a monopoly on their relationship with God. Their writings taught that for thousands of years God called them and them alone to be the example to the world on how human beings ought to live. The entire Biblical narrative, starting with calling Abraham to be the Father of the Nation, from Joseph bringing the people to live in Egypt, from Moses, leading the people out of Egypt, to David uniting the nation, to the evil kings causing the nation to be captured by Babylon, to Ezra and Nehemiah leading the people back home to Jerusalem to rebuild and restore

the nation, Jews were convinced that God was on their side and they were the only people on earth who had such close contact with the creator.

This world view is reflected in the Psalms, the poetry of the people. So many psalms boast about their God and make fun of all the other nations who worship gods of wood and stone made by human hands. No, the Creator of Heaven and Earth was the God of the Jews and them alone.

But here comes Jesus, someone whom they assumed shared their views about God and the Jewish people. Jesus announces that he is fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah. He announces that his mission is to bring good news to the poor, 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.

So far so good. But now Jesus turns everything upside down. Quoting the Jewish scriptures at his own people, he reminds them of times when God did not help Jews, but non-Jewish people. The widow the prophet Elijah helped was non Jewish. The leper the prophet Elisha helped was not Jewish either.

Suddenly, Jesus poked a huge hole in the belief system of his own community. Jesus dared speak the truth to his own people. He said that God was not only for the Jewish people — rather the Jewish God helped and desired God's blessings to fall on all people! In one sermon Jesus shattered the myth of Jewish supremacy by quoting scripture to prove God was on the side of everyone and that he, Jesus, planned to share that Good News with the world!

Can you understand why the people were upset with Jesus? Well, don't we see the same thing happening today in our world, in our nation? Isn't so much of our politics driven by ideas about white supremacy? Male supremacy? American supremacy? Look at the ads for candidates vowing to take America back to the way things used to be. We are possibly on the verge of war with Russia. Why? Because Vladimir Putin wants to take Russia back to the power and dominance they had under the USSR. It is, in fact, easy to look at so many situations big and small, near and far, and find that so much anger and hatred is driven by the fear of change.

Here is the question for us as followers of Jesus: do we choose to follow his example or not? This scripture is about the first sermon Jesus preaches and the result is that he has enraged his followers. He challenged their world-view. He declared that no, that God is not the exclusive property of the Jews. Instead the creator of the heavens and earth is concerned about all humanity. The Jews play and will always play a prominent role in God's vision for humanity. However the Jews are badly mistaken when they claim God as their exclusive property.

Jesus spoke truth to his own people and they responded by wanting to kill him. We know the story of Jesus' ministry from that day forward, don't we? Jesus never stopped speaking truth and doing truth wherever he went. For three years, Jesus spoke the truth, making waves everywhere he went. Look at his agenda: Jesus went out of his way to reach out to the poor, widows, foreigners, lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors — in fact all those rejected by society. He spoke of a world where the poor are favored above the rich, where those who make peace are glorified, where those who are suffering are closer to God than those whose lives are OK.

In short Jesus from the start made waves among all the people because he deliberately burst the world views of all his listeners. He still challenges everyone to re-think their ideas and priorities. He asks people to examine and re-evaluate themselves in the light of what God really wants for humanity. He did it back then, and he continues to do it today.

While it is not my goal to make you as mad at me as his hometown was at Jesus, I do feel that to be true to the scriptures, I have to ask us the question about our own world-views. If we claim to be followers of Jesus, then we are following someone whose mission is to challenge us to examine everything about our lives. Jesus wants us to compare our views not with each other's ideas, but with God's plan for the world. It is easier, much easier, to sort ourselves into groups of people with whom we agree. It is far, far more difficult to ask ourselves, our friends, those in the same group we are in whether our beliefs and assumptions are right and how much they agree with God.

That's the question, the real question. Are my beliefs about the world really the same as what God wants? Jesus told his audience that what they thought and what God thought were very different. Jesus' challenge for us remains the same even 2000 years later.

This time of worship is not only about praising God, singing songs, and fellowshiping with our fellow members. If that is all we do during this time together, then we have failed. Rather, Jesus calls us by means of our songs, by means of our prayers, by means our readings, by means of our preaching to examine and re-examine ourselves and our beliefs. Do we or don't we agree with God? I can assure you that not one of us is completely on the same page as God when it comes to how we understand the world and how we choose to live our lives. Every one of us falls short. Maybe you disagree. Maybe you believe I'm just making waves to get you upset.

But know this, friends, Jesus came to challenge the myths and ideas of our lives and replace them with God's. Then, armed with God's ideas, we are to go out and make our own waves in the world.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.