

Hometown Boy

COMMUNION

February 3, 2019

Luke 4: 21-30

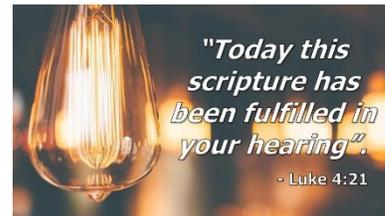
²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³ He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' 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 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.



As we begin today, let's connect the dots. The first line of our passage for today was the last line of the passage that we studied last week. In last week's scripture passage, reading from Isaiah 61, Jesus said that He was there to *"bring good news to the poor... 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"*.

As we discussed last week, Jesus then sat down and proclaimed, *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"*. Last week

I spoke of this being a 'moment of truth' for those in Jesus' audience and for us as well. The day that Jesus made this proclamation, some certainly scoffed within,



remembering that this was just Mary and Joseph's son. Others maybe toyed with the thought of this prophecy from Isaiah really being fulfilled by Jesus.

After all, it was something that many of them had longed for. Last week we also looked at this statement as a moment of truth for us as well. Our faith calls upon us to live as faithful disciples of Christ, to believe in Him, to imitate Him, to live out these tenets in our lives – bringing good news to the poor, helping the blind to see, leading people into a relationship with Jesus where they find freedom from their sins and salvation for their souls. I invite you to take a moment and to reflect upon whether or not you lived last week as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ... Let us pray...

When Jesus made this statement, we know that there were many different thoughts in the minds of those gathered that day in the synagogue. Some even voice the thought, saying, *"Is not this Joseph's son"?* Because of their doubt and questioning, the people of Nazareth want a sign. They want assurance, proof of Jesus' claim. They want a sign, to see a miracle. I can also imagine Satan also whispering into Jesus' ear, 'Just do it, Jesus', just show them who you are. But instead of any of this and instead of allowing them to sit with their thoughts for a bit, to begin to sort them out for themselves, Jesus pushes the envelope. He challenges the status quo. Jesus invites them to where He invites us – outside of our comfort zone, outside the norm, outside of the walls of our churches.

Jesus starts with a familiar proverb, speaking of a doctor's inability to cure themselves, and then says, "*Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown*". These were surely the thoughts that some were having – He's just the carpenter's boy. It can be hard to grow up someplace and then to return one day as someone else. I think this is because the resistance we feel is often the strongest from those we know. For example, think of the long-time alcoholic that has recovered and returns to his or her hometown. People just question and expect them to mess up. Or think of the old high school bully who moves back home and is now wanting to be friends with those they tormented.

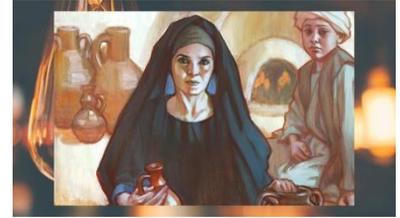


Now that He has their wheels spinning a bit, Jesus, the hometown boy, turns a dangerous corner – on purpose. Jesus invites His audience to recall two stories from the Old Testament. The first is the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. In this story (which we coincidentally read for our 7th and 8th grade Confirmation class this week) we begin by seeing how Israel is living outside of God's Law. In 1st Kings 16, Ahab comes to be the newest king of Israel. Ahab marries Jezebel, a local woman who worships Baal. Very soon she leads her husband into idol worship too and, in turn, Ahab leads his country deeper into sin as he establishes places to worship Baal. In verse 33 we read these words, "*Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him*". Ahab was an evil man.

God sends Elijah to Ahab to prophecy that because of the great sin found in Israel, there shall be no dew or rain except at Elijah's command. This news is not received well, so Elijah flees and goes into hiding. He escapes to the

wilderness, where he drinks water from the brook while the ravens bring him bread and meat. But the drought eventually causes the brook to dry up too.

God then sends Elijah to a widow in a foreign land. We recall, Elijah meets her as she is out gathering firewood to cook one last meal for herself and her son. But through this foreign widow, God provides for His



prophet Elijah as the flour and oil never run out. The last little bit of flour and oil that was going to be their deathbed meal lasts for three and a half years. But, alas, the widow's son becomes ill and dies. This leads the widow to question God. God acts again. After restoring her son to life, the widow declares in 1st Kings 17, verse 24, *"Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in your mouth is truth"*.

The second story that Jesus refers to comes from 2nd Kings 5. Since the first story, there have been a few transitions in Israel. Elijah had been brought up to heaven and Elisha, his protégé, has become the new prophet and has been blessed with a double-portion of Elijah's spirit. Ahab dies and his son Jehoram becomes king. He is slightly less evil than his father – Jehoram takes down the pillars of Baal but continues to live in sin in other ways. Wars continue to be waged and in one of these wars, an Aramean army

commander named Naaman takes a young Israelite girl as a slave for his wife. It is this young slave girl that tells Naaman that a prophet in Samaria can cure him of



the leprosy that he suffers from. Naaman tells the King of Aram and he gives Naaman a letter, written to the King of Israel, that requests that he cure Naaman of his leprosy.

Jehoram cannot do this and he tears his clothes and fears that the King of Aram is trying to pick a fight with him. But Elisha hears word of this and sends word to Jehoram, saying, *"Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel"*. Long story short, Naaman gets past his own pride and is cured of leprosy. Naaman, the Aramean army commander, comes to believe in and worship God as the one true God. As he departs, this foreigner requests to bring two mule-loads of earth with him from Israel, declaring, *"your servant will no longer offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any god except the Lord"*.

Do you catch the common theme in these two stories that Jesus reminds His audience of? From their reaction – *"all in the synagogue were filled with rage"* – Jesus' audience caught the gist of what He was implying. The folks in the synagogue that day were God's chosen people. They were the chosen people of God. As Jesus speaks, it began to dawn on them that all of these wonderful things that Jesus just read about in Isaiah 61 – good news for the poor, sight for the blind, release for the captives – were not just for them. How could that be? They were the chosen people. Yet in the stories that Jesus retold, in the stories of the widow and of Naaman, it is people outside of Israel that have sufficient faith for God to work in their lives. The hungry widows in Israel, the Israelite widows who have lost sons, the lepers who still suffer in Israel - they did not find help from God. Was true faith found outside of Israel? Was it found only there?

In response to the implications that Jesus was making - that the good news and that the healing that God had to offer applied to the widow in Zarephath and to Naaman the Aramean and to others outside of Israel – they rose and drove Jesus out of town. They drove Him to the edge of the cliff with the intention of

throwing Jesus off the cliff. This was all just too much. In their minds they questioned, how could God be for anyone other than the chosen people? This just did not fit their understanding of faith and God.

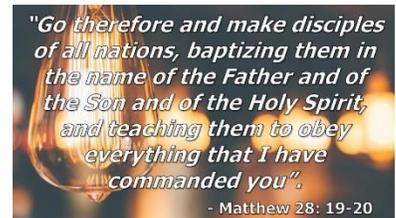


Some of the early Jewish Christians would also struggle with what these folks from Nazareth struggled with in our passage today. The early Christians were happy that the "hometown boy" had made good. They were overjoyed that the Messiah had been born just as the Old Testament prophets had predicted – born to a virgin mother in the city of David - and that He had grown up to be a Jewish rabbi from Galilee. He was one of them. He fit their understandings of God and faith. But they were uncomfortable with the idea that the "good news" and that the "year of the Lord's favor" that Isaiah spoke of and wrote about would apply to everyone. They wanted to hold back the light that Jesus wanted shared with the whole world.

The leaders in the early church fought hard at first to keep Jesus within the Jewish world. They too did not want the circle expanded. The early apostles only preached the good news of Jesus Christ to their fellow Jews. And when the Holy Spirit began to expand the ministry, even just to neighboring Samaria, the leaders wanted the new believers to first be circumcised and then to follow all of the Jewish Laws before accepting them as new believers. In essence, they wanted the new believers to first become good Jews and only then could they become good Christians. But one vision at a time, one revelation at a time, the Holy Spirit began to work within the apostles and through the church to help them to understand that Jesus came to save the whole world, not just the

chosen people. Soon enough the requirements of circumcision and all the dietary and other laws were allowed to fade as the work of reaching new people became the supreme mission.

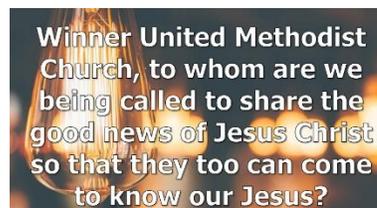
Missionaries like Paul and Timothy and Silas and others began to move outside of the Promised Land, taking the gospel to places like Corinth and Ephesus and Galatia and even to Rome. Churches began popping up all over the known world as the hometown boy went global. The news that Jesus first shared in his hometown of Nazareth – that He came to save all people everywhere – would soon be lived out by the early church and would be experienced by the whole world. It is a mission that we are also invited to be a part of – to *"go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"*.



The understanding that Jesus' good news is news for the whole world isn't a threat, but an invitation that should lead us to action. In our hearts, we know that it is an invitation, but if we are honest, sometimes we get a little comfortable here, don't we? It is nice to look down the pew and to see familiar faces. It is cozy to stand in the back after worship while we have a cup of coffee and maybe a cookie, while we chat with those we already know. Friends, when we are honest, we must admit that we are a bit like the Israelites and like the early church, happy to remain in our little, closed circle. But as Jesus shared today in the stories of the widow and of Naaman, we know that our God is a big

God, that our God is the God of all nations and all peoples, that our God is unlimited.

The truth is, we can be a part of bringing Jesus to all peoples and all nations. We can make the choice to be invitational and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to all we know and meet. You and I can make that choice. As we come to a close and prepare to transition into Holy Communion, in the sacrament we are once again reminded that the church, that our church, is a place with open doors and open hearts and an open table that welcomes one and all. With that in mind, I leave you with essentially the same question I left you with last week: Winner United Methodist Church, to whom are we being called to share the good news of Jesus Christ so that they too can come to know our Jesus? Let us pray...



GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) How has your understanding of the global nature of Jesus' mission changed as your faith has matured? How or where can it grow more?
- 2) Do you know groups or people who want to keep Jesus' mission confined to the church itself? Pray for their vision and understanding to increase.
- 3) Where are you sensing Jesus' invitation to be in mission in Winner or Colome or Ideal or...? How can the church help your vision come to life?