

## Sermon Text – Sunday, February 2, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: I Corinthians 13; 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Psalm 71 & Jeremiah 1:4-10  
Scripture for Message: Luke 4:21-30 “Let God”**

We're used to reading this passage of scripture assuming that the people of the synagogue flew into a murderous rage because this "son of Joseph" was claiming to be the one anointed. That does not seem to be the message Luke is trying to bring to his readers. In Matthew 13:53-58, or Mark 6:1-6 it is implied that the people took offense to the miracles, and they were appalled that "Joseph's son" would be bold enough to make those claims from scripture. I wonder if that was just the perspective of the Pharisees in the synagogue. Luke on the other hand states that the people were amazed at his message of grace, amazed that the son of Joseph whom they had watched grow up would be so knowledgeable and full of gracious words. We might be missing an important message if we group Luke with the other two Gospel writers.

When Jesus states, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," he is indicating to them that things were about to change. For the people who watched him grow up and for those who thought they knew him things would most certainly change. We might think, on first reading, that Jesus' words to them were challenging. "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" But I wonder if he was merely giving it to them straight, truly I tell you things are not going to be as you want or expect them. Sometimes the differences between what the congregation wants and where God leads them create anger and resentment.

Jesus' statements indicate he understands that maybe his ministry would not be specifically for them. Prophets are not necessarily sent to their hometowns for ministry, Jesus indicates this when he talks about the miracles of Elijah and Elisha – those miracles mentioned were for Gentiles. The Jeremiah's hometown rejected him as a prophet, yet God appointed him as a prophet to the nations and God commanded him, "You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you." It was not a foreign notion to the people of Jesus' time that God would gather even gentiles to God's kingdom. I don't think the people were amazed or upset that Jesus' words meant that God included Gentiles in the promises even though they knew foreigners and aliens were always included.

The ones who listened to Jesus in the synagogue that day were probably extended family and friends who had known "Joseph's son" for thirty years. They had heard the tales about his mission and ministry to towns such as Capernaum, but now Jesus was home and home was special, home is special. The people were

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amazed that such gracious words would come from the lips of one they knew so well. They expected that, because he performed miracles in a stranger's town, the miracles he performs for them will be so much greater. So, when they tried to grasp the meaning of what he was telling them, that "no prophet is accepted in his hometown" they flew into a murderous rage because they misunderstood.

They heard Jesus telling them they were not the "preferred" ones. They were not going to be first in line for Jesus' miracles – they were not better than anyone else in God's kingdom. They became angry because this Jesus, one of their own, was not going to use God's power in the ways they wanted him to. They people will reject a prophet who, as they interpret Jesus' words, withholds God's favor from them, from Nazareth specifically. They people were amazed at Jesus' message of grace but enraged when they perceived that grace would be withheld from them.

Their rage, a gross overreaction, nevertheless may have come from resentment – do for us what you did for others, we want to see miracles and reap the benefits of having known you longer. Their murderous rage had them wanting to toss Jesus onto the stones, throwing him off a cliff. This is reminiscent of one of Satan's temptations of Jesus in the wilderness. Matthew 4:6 states, "If you are the Son of God," he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" But Jesus walked right through the crowd. It was a miracle that no harm came to him, but it was not the miracle the people wanted to see, and not what they expected.

When Jesus turns and walked right through the crowd, that action illustrates that he was God sent, God led, and God protected. Jesus turns the "other cheek" and walks away from the violence. Was it love that protected Jesus? God's love surely but also the people's love of God and remembering God's commandments – Thou shalt not murder. You see, God does grant miracles, but not to every person who needs one, not even to God's chosen people. I wonder if more than anything this sequence of events reminds us that God will do what God will do and God will show no favoritism to any individual or group of individuals.

The people in the synagogue were furious when they heard Jesus' words, the resentment they felt drove them into a murderous rage. If they couldn't own Jesus and benefit from Jesus' power, then they had no use for him whatsoever. What good is a prophet and miracle worker in your hometown if you don't gain advantages over the "others?" What good is knowing someone with power or influence if you don't get benefits? What good is a relationship with Jesus if we don't get what we want out of it?

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Do you hear it? Have you once or twice in your lives felt the same way as the people of Jesus' hometown? They aren't very different from us. We don't necessarily drag Jesus to a cliff, but we also feel resentment and anger when Jesus does not give us what we think we want. Isn't there just a twinge of resentment or anger when we realize that the ones we would never include in God's kingdom God does indeed include. What about our feelings when we determine that a person or group of persons is receiving God's favor over us, as if God's favor was a limited commodity. Have you ever asked the question, "Why is that person or that church more blessed than us?" Have you ever wished disaster, or hardship would fall on your perceived enemies?

When Jesus does not seem to perform as we think he ought, we sometimes become resentful. Sometimes people reject Jesus for those very reasons. We don't fly into a murderous rage looking for the nearest rock pile to toss Jesus, but indifference settles in and that can be more dangerous than anger. People leave the church over petty things or because Jesus and the church didn't do for them what they felt they deserved. People develop a "meh" attitude toward Jesus and Christianity – I wonder if that isn't a big part of the world's problems today. Jesus? take him or leave him – but there is a danger to your eternal soul in that attitude.

We try to put Jesus in a container built of our own desires and expectations. We fail to let Jesus be Jesus, to let God be God. The lesson is that – "He will not always be what we want. He will rarely be what we expect. However, he will always be God and God is free."<sup>1</sup> God is indeed free from any expectation humanity will impose on God. So, the question is – will we let God be God?

Truly I tell you – Jesus was not telling the people of his hometown that they would be excluded from God's promises, he told them that others would be included. No longer could these people claim exclusive possession of divine favor. That made them angry enough to want to toss Jesus on to the rocks. They hoped for a Messiah that would treat them as special and exalt their nation – they did not particularly want a Messiah who would [in their minds] merely heal and forgive sins. They thought their salvation would come in the form of removing the Romans from their lands.

We, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be careful not to behave as Jesus' neighbors behaved. We cannot go to God with expectations and conditions. We cannot dictate to God what God should or will do. Everything we learn from scripture is that God is the creator of all things and what God created God loves. God's love

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<sup>1</sup> Matt Fitzgerald. "Luke 4:21-30: Homiletical Perspective" *Feasting on The Gospels: Luke, Vol 1, Chapters 1-11*. eds. Cynthia Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson. WJK. 2014. Print. 105-109.

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is universal. We are special to God but so are people in other nations around the globe, so are people who do not worship God exactly as we worship God. Which is why we include “those whose names we do not know” in our prayers.

I wonder if part of the problem here is that Jesus’ neighbors were unwilling to accept that things were going to change, and it was that unwillingness to change and unwillingness to hear how things would change that enraged them so. Change is hard for us as it was for them. Jesus reminded the people of the Torah requirements for the year of jubilee; he reminded them that the one sent would “proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and set the oppressed free.” With these things change would have to happen and people could no longer go about as they had. Social transformation was on its way to the people in Nazareth of Galilee.

Was that necessarily a bad thing? We at times fear change, fear the unknown, and fear what “social transformation” might look like. There are some of us who do not want progress but desire familiarity, desire things to be as they are or were in the past because we are comfortable with what is familiar. However, change is inevitable in our world – we’ve seen that in many ways recently. As a society we’ve adapted to many changes, even our own worship services have adapted over time.

If we are going to let God be God, then change is going to happen. The God who created all things continues creating – God continues to make things new. Of course that is true, but for those who fear change God also is present in times of trial so there is no need to fear. God is our rock and fortress, as the words of Psalm 71 remind us “In you Lord, I have taken refuge; you let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me. . . for you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth.” The Psalmist knew it, Jeremiah knew it and Jesus knew too the protection and strength of God in God’s presence. We too can know that strength as we let God be God and accept the changes that God brings to our lives. Even when those changes mean we do not have any special status in this world.