

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

February 3, 2013

Luke 4:20-32

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.

"Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

"I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.

They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

Imagine you are sitting in a doctor's office. You've had a nagging pain for the past few months. You went and had it checked out by a family doctor and the family doctor quickly referred to you a specialist because they found an unusual sized lump where your pain was coming from and the lump was beyond their level expertise. You went to see the specialist and now here you sit. Waiting to hear what the diagnosis is for your lump.

What would you want to hear the specialist say? Would you like to be assured it isn't cancer? Would you like to hear the word treatable? Would you like to hear the word curable? What if you heard the word cancer or untreatable? What if it was the word terminal? How would you react? What words would you rather hear in this situation? I have a feeling the words we would all want to hear would be that it isn't cancer, or if it was, it was treatable and curable. I doubt we'd like hearing the words terminal or fatal.

What do you think the crowd in the synagogue wanted to hear today? Last week we saw the first half of this story. We saw how reports about Jesus miracles were getting out. Luke says, "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom."

"And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'" We heard Jesus proclaim the year of the Lord's favor was here and announce he was God's promised messiah.

But we never talked about the reaction from the crowd. Do you think this revelation was what they wanted to hear? Luke gives us a hint about their reaction. He says, "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked." It appears they were impressed with him. They were amazed at how well he spoke and at his command when he taught, but I sense their opinion about him wasn't all positive.

Why? Another way to translate the words "speak well of him" would be to say the people "were impressed by him." I don't know about you, but I can be impressed by someone even though I don't agree with them. How so? I can watch a tv show and see scientists proclaim evolution is true and we should all follow it. I can be impressed by the way scientists carry themselves and how they speak, but just because I'm impressed by their demeanor doesn't mean I have to agree with them.

This is the exact attitude the people of Nazareth had about Jesus. They had seen him grow up in their midst. They had spent time with him, talked with him, worked with him, they were impressed with how he carried himself in the synagogue, but they never expected him to say these things about himself and when he did say these things about himself they didn't agree with him. We see their disagreement with him when they say, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

These words present part of the picture of what was going through their minds, but if we could picture their thoughts like little cartoon word bubbles coming off of their heads I wonder if they would possibly

look like this, “I know this guy looks like and talks like Jesus, but where did the real Jesus who we know and love go. This can’t be him. He never had the command and presence this guy does. This can’t be him. I never saw this or expected this coming from him. He’s crazy.”

Their sinful pride prevented them from hearing the true message of Jesus. It prevented them from believing he was God’s messiah because they couldn’t get past the fact they knew him since he was a little boy and they had never expected this of him. Jesus realizes this and attacks their sinful pride at the end of his sermon. He says, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

“‘I tell you the truth,’ he continued, ‘no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.’”

Jesus pleads with the citizens of Nazareth. He says don’t let your memories fool you. Don’t let them cloud your judgment. The people of Israel did this and they rejected two of God’s prophets because they had the same attitude and belief about Elijah and Elisha that you have about me. If you continue down this path it is going to lead to your destruction in hell because you have rejected me because I am God’s plan of salvation to rescue the world.

The people ignore Jesus’ pleas and become angry because of his stories. “All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.” They got his point. They understood his comparison and how he was aiming God’s law at them, but they rejected his warning because they didn’t believe in him and didn’t want to hear God’s law.

What would we hear Jesus say to us today? Would his message be any different to us at all than it was in Nazareth? I guess there would be some differences. Our impressions of him haven’t been formed because we have seen him grow up. Or we have been able to talk with him over lunch. Or we have seen what he has made as a carpenter. But do our impressions of him ever become like the impressions the people of Nazareth had of him?

Most of us have a picture of who Jesus is and what he means to us. We know he is our savior who loves us and has given up his life for us. We know we are weak, but he is strong. We know he is able to do miracles and watches over us. We love thinking about him like this because all of these thoughts are good things because they remind us about his love for us and what he has done for us, but will Jesus always say things to us that we want to hear?

What if we outwardly confess Jesus as our savior and rejoice because he has forgiven all our sins, but we indulge our sinful natures with a sin only we know about or live ignorantly and blissfully unaware of our sin because we forgot God’s law which condemns our sin? What if someone catches us on it and calls us

to repent of it? What if their words hurt and are words which we don't like or want to hear? What should we do?

We can try and strike a bargain with Jesus by saying, "You know Jesus. I've known you my whole life. You have always been reasonable and forgiving towards me, but someone told me I was living in sin. I don't believe them. I know you love me and you forgive me. Why would they tell me any different? I look at my life and it is much much better than theirs. They lie and cheat. I don't do that. They curse and steal. I don't do that. I ask for forgiveness every night. Who are they to judge me?"

But is the person who calls us to repent really judging us? No. They are pointing out our sins to us and urging us to repent of them because they love and care about us. They know if we continue down the path of sin that it will lead us to hell. They want us to be crushed by God's law and realize how desperately we need to hear what Jesus has to say. Jesus wants us to know he hates sin and we invite his wrath on ourselves when we ignore our own sin.

But Jesus wrath about sin isn't the only thing he wants us to hear. He also wants us to hear about his love for us. "Jesus walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority." Jesus wants us to hear his message he taught with authority about he is God's messiah promised to come into this world.

Jesus wants us to hear how he came into this world to die. The people of Nazareth tried to kill him, but he wouldn't let them because his time had not yet come. He did this because he would die where and when he wanted to because he would willingly give up his life for us. He would give up his life for us because it paid for all of our sins. He wants us to hear how he has risen from the dead and promises us eternal life forever with him.

What would you want to hear in the doctor's office when waiting for test results? I would guess we'd like to hear the tests are negative and we have nothing to worry about. What do you want to hear when Jesus speaks to you? I would guess it would be the words, "I'm God's servant who has rescued you from sin. You are forgiven. Go in peace." Amen.