

We are spending one more week on a section of Luke 4. Last week, Jared intentionally left out reading the last verses of this section of Luke, knowing that I would pick it up this week. What I find so interesting about this story is not what Jesus read and said, but the people's response to the message. Initially, the people respond very favorably to his message, which was the hopes and dreams of the people of Israel –

*“...Good news to the poor...release of the captive...recovery of sight to the blind...to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

I think the message was received even more graciously by the people because of the verse that was left out from Isaiah 61 – **“...the day of vengeance of our God.”** In hearing the message, Luke tells us what people thought of the message - **“<sup>22</sup>All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.”**

However, the mood and the response of the people change after a brief dialogue between Jesus and the people, which followed the reading of Isaiah – **“<sup>28</sup>...all in the synagogue were filled with rage.<sup>29</sup> 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.”**

Now, I've preached a bad sermon or two in my time and received many unfavorable responses from people, but never has anyone actually tried to throw me off a cliff! (Maybe people wanted to, but...)

Why the shift?

What did Jesus say that caused the people to turn so violently against him?

What “nerve” was touched to illicit such a response?

So, let's look at more closely to the text. First, Jesus opens by voicing what the people were thinking and feeling by stating a well known proverb – “Doctor cure yourself!” What the proverb points to is the belief that **“one must not refuse to do one's own the favors one does for others.”** A simpler translation of the deep seated notion of the people is that Jesus who bestow the favor of the Lord, first and foremost, must do for his own people - **“Do now for your own what you've done for others.”** This is what was meant when they ask, “Is not this Joseph's son?” Jesus was one on their own and they were so pleased to hear that the year of Lord's favor had finally come upon them. For perhaps once in their entire lives, Galileans, were going to be the center of the Universe as God through one of their own sons, whom they raised and knew by name, was going to bless them over against “others”.

Their first gracious response to Jesus' message was in anticipation of Jesus doing in his home-town what they have already heard he has done in Capernaum and in other places for other peoples.

Here, Jesus opens the deeply rooted and seated ways human beings have always lived on this side of Eden, as “tribes” of people living competitively against others for resources of the earth and even for God's favor. The people of Nazareth were no

different. They lived in a deeply divided world with invisible and yet very real “rings of concentric circles that defined who was “in” and who was “out”. Closer you were in the concentric circles, closer you were, and further away you were, farther you were to merit concern, care or protection. To the people of Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, the people of Capernaum may just have come from “Mars”!

Tribalism is live and well today. Those of you who grew up in Edinburgh know what is to think of those who came from Glasgow...And those of you who grew up in Northern Ireland, you know what it means to be “orange” and those who were not. For those of us who grew up a proud Presbyterians, you know what it is to think about “those Catholics”, whom we believed were bound for the fiery furnace of Hell for the errors of their ways. For me growing up in South Korea, tribalism was defined not just be geography, by education, skin tone, dress, and the dialect you spoke. The boundaries of tribe is arbitrary, it can be established on any number of criteria, but it always someone or some groups as “others”. In tribalism there is always, “us” vs. “them”.

In this divided and tribal world, Jesus reveals a God who has no boundaries and loyalties defined by race, class, gender, or condition. He was no longer just the God of Israel, but God who inhabits the humble poverty of a widow living in a God forsaken town of Zarephath, and who heals the skin condition of a Syrian soldier. God was, and always has been, far bigger and unbounded then people believed and wanted. He loved the World and everything that was in it, and even though He cared deeply for the people He made covenant with, God in Jesus Christ was going to make the same covenant of grace with others, even with our enemies.

People understood God to be “their” God, exclusively. But in Jesus, “God of Israel” was not a god of one peoples of the earth, but the God of all peoples, tribes, and Nations of people, who acted not just on behalf of His own people but on behalf of all. This surprised and angered the people.

How big is your God? Is your God, still a god of your particular tribe, however you have come to define your tribe? Or, is the God we came here to worship, so big, so grand, so generous and magnanimous, that He dares to cross any and all boundaries we might want to erect.

In the most entertaining and deeply spiritual book called, “Pastorix”, written by Nadia Bolz-Weber, the most unlikely pastor of a Lutheran Church, she writes;

***“...the thing that sucks is that every time we draw a line between ‘us’ and ‘others’, Jesus is always on the other side of it. Damn!”***

Lets start drawing our circles ever wider...Amen.