

The Good Doctor

Luke 4:14-30

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ January 14, 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.

15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 “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,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 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. (Luke 4:14-30, NRSV)

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“One of these things is not like the others.”

When I first looked this up I came across images from Sesame Street. Tell me I’m not the only one to remember Sesame Street. In the game, you had to pick out the object that was different from all of the rest. In this one for example, you would think it would be a pretty easy game. But what if you are color blind?¹

[Image of 3 red balloons and a blue one]

I start with this, because this is something every single person in the room can relate to. We are taught from such a young age, as a part of our learning, to put things in categories. It helps us organize our thoughts and to achieve certain goals. But unchecked, we also learn, unconsciously sometimes, to place a value on objects or people that look less like the objects or people around them. From that beginning, entire worldviews are developed around those values. Then, the worldview of those in the most powerful position...wins.

This is a weekend to be incredibly grateful for a man who wouldn’t settle for the way this category game is played, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Each week, we gather here in this building to celebrate and to worship a God who dwelt among us and also refused to play this category game, in fact changed all of the categories, and as a result, like Martin Luther King, was despised as much as he was honored.

¹ Sesame Street. Not Like the Other.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsRjQDrDnY8>

On this same weekend, we remember that eight years ago, the country of Haiti experienced the complete devastation in less than a minute of a category 7 earthquake. No one on the island was untouched by the event. Saint Boniface Haiti Foundation, a health organization in Haiti issued this statement on Friday on the 8th anniversary, and I want to read this small piece of it. Regardless of what may have been said about his country on the same day, it seems that rather than honor those comments, it is right to honor these amazing and inspiring people. The President/CEO of Saint Boniface writes:

I know you stand with me today in remembering those who were lost, honoring those who survived horrible ordeals during and after the disaster, and celebrating the resilient and optimistic spirit of the Haitian people who said "we can recover, we can move forward, we will survive and thrive again."

So today, let's lift up that truth about the Haiti we know, and the incredible Haitian people we are so honored to work with, side by side.

Kenbe fem, (Hold Strong)

Conor²

Not everyone feels the same respect for these people. Some might even say that their country is not like the others. But once you know stories of these individuals, which is often the case, you meet a courage and strength we can only dream about. It's interesting to me that the slogan of Saint Boniface Haiti Foundation is "Providing Care Where No Else Does." You can hear in that slogan that these healthcare workers are well aware of how they often rank in the world.

We do find hope in some places though. Because of the work of King and so many others, there is still an openness to others that speak other languages than we might often think. I really like this commercial:

[ANDROID VIDEO]³

² www.haitihealth.org/news/statement-8th-anniversary-haitian-earthquake

I apologize for the product placement here. We do need to be reminded sometimes that there may be hope yet.

It is thought that Luke, the writer of this gospel, was a disciple of Paul, and a doctor. In Colossians, the word Paul uses for him in Greek, literally means "the one who heals". And as a result, you would assume, which seems to be true in this account, that he would be paying special attention to how Jesus heals. In this case, what becomes a primary issues, is not *how* Jesus heals, but *who* Jesus heals, and perhaps, who Jesus does not.

This story has to be the quickest and most dramatic rising and falling from grace in all history. From an all-embracing approval of Jesus, to leading him out to the edge of a cliff to be thrown off, all in the matter of only a few minutes. *What happened?*

If you were here last Sunday, you might shudder just a little to remember strangely similar words from Satan. Remember? Satan led Jesus to the edge of a cliff as well, and he said, "Throw yourself down, God will protect you!" He wanted something spectacular, and so did these people. Jesus predicted that they, too, would want to see spectacular things, healings, and even call him 'Doctor' sarcastically when he was being crucified, calling for him to save himself.

He essentially told his friends and family that he was going to do a lot more healing in Capernaum where he was headed than for them. But Jesus was just getting started. He compares what he was about to do to Elijah.

Elijah could have healed plenty of Jewish widows in Israel...

...but he didn't.

He healed only one, a woman in Sidon, who was not Jewish.

Jesus keeps going. He points out that another prophet Elisha could have healed any of the Jewish lepers in Israel...

³ Youtube. *Android: 100 Billion Words.*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIKOJKTQcl8>

...but he didn't.

Instead, he healed only one, Naaman, who was a commander of the Syrian army, their enemy.⁴

And this was the moment when they snapped, grabbing him and leading him to the edge of the cliff.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, there two primary things that got him into trouble: Who he claimed to be, and who he claimed as *his* people. He hits them both in this passage, but the people seem to totally miss the first one.

Jesus reads from Isaiah the job description of the Messiah, which would have been a famous passage, a prophecy longed for by these people: *I have been anointed to bring good news to the poor, release the captives, heal the blind, free the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.* Then in the world's shortest sermon he says, "*Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing...*"

Everyone spoke well of him. They were amazed. "Ahh, Joseph's son, what a good boy."

Did every single person there miss it? I can't help but believe there had to be at least that one guy, perhaps a friend that he grew up with, whose jaw dropped as he essentially called himself the Messiah and rolled up the scroll, everyone else in his family whisking him away to the after party. "Hey! Didn't you all just hear what he said? Didn't you connect what he just said?"

No matter, Jesus would move on to #2 on the list of things not to say too soon if you're the Messiah, and they would definitely hear him this time.

Here he is back in his hometown. At the end of Luke 2, it says that Jesus was growing in wisdom and years, and in divine and human favor. But all that human favor was about to go out the window. Jesus' approval rating was in a great place, then with a couple of comments, it fell off the cliff.

But Jesus didn't. Fall off the cliff, that is. Did this story just end with a miracle? He resisted the

temptation to prove God's protection by jumping off a high place to Satan yesterday, then, God protects him from being thrown off a cliff in a spectacular way, today, but no one seems to get it. Someone must have noticed. Perhaps it was that same observant friend who noticed his words earlier.

But we'll never know.

What we will know is the short fuse of Jesus' friends and family when he suggested that most of his healing and spectacular ministry would take place out of town and for the wrong people. God's people had been waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of a Messiah for hundreds of years. And now Jesus was saying that they were not even going to get the best of it. The foreigners would get it. Their enemies would get it. But not them, at least not yet.

In John's account of the Gospel, he spells this out in the very first verses of his gospel:

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.⁵

You see, these words tell a bit more of the story of why his people were so angry. His own people did not accept him. Why? Because ALL who received him – not Jewish people, not good people, but ALL people – who believed in his name, he gave the *power* to *become* the children of God. The problem is that the people who were born into the nation of Israel and were devout Jews, like Jesus' family of origin, *were* the children of God. Now God was saying it didn't matter. God was now in the business of adoption, and ALL who wanted in on the promise just had to step forward and accept him as Savior of *their* lives, too...even their enemies.

It dawned on them fairly quickly that this man...their brother, friend, son...was claiming that

⁴ Wright, NT. Luke for Everyone. Pg. 47.

⁵ John 1:10-13

the gift that had promised to them, was special to them, was an invitation for the whole world. And they were angry, at least at first.

This may be where our story ends for today, but it's actually not the end of the story for Jesus or these people. Not all of them remained angry. Many of them, at some point that it would be difficult to pinpoint, returned to Jesus' side, and were with Jesus in the end, weeping at the foot of the cross even when all of his disciples turned their backs and fled. Some may not have rejoined him. What would have made the difference?

At some point, the ones who came back to join Jesus, heard the rest of the message. In fact it was their very angry that formed a foundation for them to realize how amazing God's grace really is. If the love of God could really be for *THOSE* people, then the love and grace of God could even reach in to the parts of my heart that I could never before imagine God would go.

They understood the real nature of the gospel. But it began by running the other way. Like Jonah, told to go to the Ninevites, so naturally he bought a boat ticket for the exact opposite direction. He just couldn't believe that God want him to go to *those* people. And when he did go, he came to proclaim God's judgment upon them. Was he happy about it when they changed their lives around and God spared them? He wept, and they were not tears of joy.

The irony of Jonah saying through clenched teeth: "This is why I didn't want to come, God! I knew you were a gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love! Now look what you've done." Our deep concern about the frivolousness of the gospel message may just be a great foundation to really knowing the abounding, steadfast love of God. It might even happen at the same time.

What if we had a chance to hear and understand all that we proclaim about God's grace? Sometimes it takes someone like Annie to remind us.

There was a story a man told of a girl and her dad who were sitting in the narthex of the church during worship one Sunday. In one hand she had a battered blue shovel, and she was drooling on her shirt. He was surprised that Annie didn't join the

other kids to their own time of worship part way through the service. He realized there church like so many was just not equipped to handle her special needs, and she didn't want to go into the sanctuary. So with his own broken sense of self-importance, he came and sat with the two of them and worshipped and sang from the narthex. He said, as he sang the lyrics of the song the congregation was singing, she would come around and stand in front of him and repeat back each phrase or line as if it was a question.

I once was lost...I once was lost?

But now am found...But now you're found?

Was blind but now I see...blind but

now...you see?

With innocent curiosity she gave him an amazing gift. She helped him see faith through her eyes, and he saw the beauty of actually believing what he was singing.⁶

What is it going to take for us to really understand the gospel?

There may be some here today who are angry at Jesus' words.

You're angry because you have been prayed to experience God in a profound way, and someone has seemingly walked in off the street and been blown away to tears about how much God loves them, tears that should have been yours, and you're jealous.

Or you're angry because you been belittled by someone or a group of people your whole life, and someone from that group is applauded as they share about the way God changed their life on a mission trip.

Or perhaps you are angry because someone prayed for a government leader that has been the cause of much pain instead of praying for you, and they know what's going on in *your* life.

Or maybe you've wanted to be close to God your whole life, and it's always felt just out of reach, but you hear from a friend who is on top of the world after a Christian concert the night before.

⁶ www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2012/february-online-only/unexpected-grace.html

It's not fair. The reality is that I hope there are some angry people here today. Do you know why? Because your angry is an indication that you understand what the gospel is all about.

Paul's one prayer for the Ephesians is that they would have the power to grasp the love of God...how high, how long, how deep, and how wide. Most of us are pretty good three out of four of those.

When we worship, we raise our hands upward and we acknowledge how high is God's love. When we look back on our lives, some of us much further back than others, and we thank God for how long is God's love.

When we have an ah-hah moment in a time of quiet reading Scripture, we proclaim how deep is God's love.

But to realize that Jesus opens the door to adopt into the family even those we have most counted out, we have to grasp how wide is God's love. It's not easy. How could God allow them into the Kingdom?

C.S. Lewis talks about the difference between us forgiving someone, and God forgiving someone who has wronged us, and allowing them into the Kingdom.

It is quite natural for a man to forgive something you do him. Thus, if someone cheats me out of five pounds, it is quite natural for me to say, well, "I forgive him, we will say no more about it."

But what on earth would you say if someone had done you out of five pounds, and I said, "That is all right, I forgive him."

Who is that person in your life?

Martin Luther King, Jr. was very clear that they could not remain silent. But their protest would be peaceful from their end. They would continue to treat their oppressors like the children of God that they also were, while taking a very firm stand against their attitudes. And many were angry with him. Because of Dr. King, many people, both black and white, realized that human dignity extended to all people, and they changed. But many held on to their anger for the rest of their lives.

What if I sat down this week and spent some time trying to realize all the people that Jesus wants to invite into his kingdom?

What if I kept going further and further out from my expectations until I was a little bit angry at God?

That might be the moment that I realize God's love can even come fully for me. If I'm honest, I believe God loves parts of me. Parts of me. But there are parts of me that I think I really need to change before God can embrace all of me.

That's not the gospel.

And as the Great Physician, that's why Jesus said that he has not come for the healthy, for those who have fixed themselves up for his arrival.

He has come for the sick. For those who knew they could not fix themselves.

Maybe Jesus' observant friend went home and did this and was the first of many who returned and began to follow Jesus in freedom.

Rosa Park said "I want to be remembered as a person who wanted to be free so other people could be free."

It's time for us to live out the freedom of the true width of the gospel that we have been adopted into.

God is Good? *All the time.*

Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Take another look at Luke 4:14-30. Which part of this passage is most surprising to you?
2. What did Jesus mean when he said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"?

3. In verse 23, Jesus predicts how they will eventually treat him. How do the words of the people that he sees coming compare with the words of Satan that Jesus encountered in the desert earlier in the chapter?

4. Why does Jesus mention the widow of Zarephath and Naaman? And what might have made the people “filled with rage” as a result of remembering their stories?

5. Read John 1:10-13. How does this passage parallel what is happening in Luke 4? Are there any clues that help us better understand?

6. Does this passage end with a miracle at the edge of the cliff? Did the people not have Jesus in their grasp, prepared to throw him off? What questions does this bring up?

7. How is Jesus challenging the worldview of his own people in this passage? Does this challenge our own worldview? Do we think we have a “grasp on Jesus,” or is he slipping through our fingers and “passing through our midst”?

8. If it is true today that this “scripture is fulfilled in our hearing,” how might this challenge our community in the ways we worship and serve others?

Table to Table Question

A question for kids and adults to answer together

If you met Jesus when he was on earth, what questions would you ask him?

What would you want to understand about why he came?