

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's gospel is the conclusion of a narrative arc that we started last Sunday. In case you forgot where we are in the story: Jesus was in his hometown, and he read from Isaiah in the synagogue. This passage builds out the vision of God's plan to "bring good news to the poor...proclaim release to the captives...sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This is where today's episode picks up, and we finally get the people's reaction. First, they were amazed! Remember, they knew Jesus as a carpenter's son. And, during Jesus' life, over 95% of people were likely illiterate. So, they were probably stunned that the rumors that he was reading the scriptures and teaching were true. And because those rumors were true, then perhaps they thought that the stories about his actions were true too!

This is where things got dicey. Jesus preemptively responded to what he thinks they will be asking of him. He named a cryptic proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" and says that they will want him to do what he has done elsewhere. Let's pause for a moment and look at the word "do." Last week, we discussed how Jesus's ministry was more than words, it was also action. It was both words *and* action. In today's reading, the word translated as "do" is in the aorist active imperative tense in Greek. Basically, what that means is that it's a command to again do what was previously done. In this case, it's the command for Jesus to do what he did in Capernaum. And, let's keep reading, Jesus went on to say that no prophet will be

accepted in the prophet's hometown. Or, to translate it from Greek more directly, no prophet will be acceptable in the prophet's hometown.

Ok, let's talk about why this all matters. The situation Jesus predicted was that because the people of his hometown had seen that he could read, preach, and teach, they will likely command him to do miracles for his hometown. They will tell him that he needs to give *more* attention to those in his hometown. And, because no prophet is acceptable in their hometown, ultimately, no matter what he does, he will never do or be enough for them.

As we read this story I'm reminded that we're in the season of the church year called the "Time after Epiphany." During this season, we are encouraged to look at the texts as revealing something about our God. I would argue that this text not only reveals something about God, but also about human nature. For, so often it's our human nature that we are like those in Nazareth. We want our needs met, we want it to be about us, and we put on the demeanor of, say, Veruca Salt demanding that, "I want it now." We command certain actions. We are impatient with the checkout clerk, we are snippy with our direct reports, we are frustrated with our boss, and we yell at our family and friends. We get this way even in the church. We get frustrated that the time we've spent at church, in prayer, or in giving to those in need has not resulted in what we believe we deserve. We, like those at Nazareth, believe that our connections, our actions, and our privilege require that we get what we want and what we command of our God. So, we get so frustrated by misaligned expectations then we, like those in Nazareth, are so overcome by rage that we want to destroy our God.

And that's ironic that the God angers us is the God who demands peaceful equity. It's the God who shares love, grace, and healing with all the world. It's a God who did not come for the few in Nazareth or only your family, but for the many, for all people and all creation. In today's reading, Jesus's refused to play favorites in Nazareth, and he rejected the offer to be their preacher-and-healer-in-residence. That action revealed a God we can trust. And we can fact check the character of our God. We can look to God revealed in Jesus who will welcome those on the margins, a God who will work to feed the masses through radical generosity, and a God who will stand up to religious and political hypocrisy with an eye for justice, peace, and forgiveness. It's a God who in today's reading says that "TODAY this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

You see, the God that is revealed in Luke's gospel is not a removed God who is watching and waiting to whisk you away for some great reward in an afterlife. The scriptures fulfillment, that is the good news to the poor, the release for the captives, the sight for the blind, the freedom for the oppressed, and the radical forgiveness of all is here now – *TODAY!*

It's a thing that God does equitably, and to those of us who have the scales tipped towards us in a favored way, God's equity can feel like injustice. God's goodness shared with all people can feel like we're getting the short end of the stick. For when white people begin thinking about their white privilege and how that privilege impacts others after many years of blindness, the change can feel oppressive. To those of us who fit in the gender assigned at birth or the gender expression determined by mass produced consumerism, having to share pronouns or interact with gender fluidity can feel like an affront. To those of us living within the borders of the United States, it can feel like it might all come crashing down if we share a bit of our gift with refugees and immigrants. And you see, that is what is revealed in Christ.

Christ has come to you, to me, and to our neighbor of a different political party in the exact same way. Christ loves us with the fullness that each of us needs. So too, Christ gives us the opportunity to embody this love. The love found in today's reading second reading that is oh, so familiar at weddings. The love that surrenders our individualism to share for the good of all. To be clear, that's not to sacrifice oneself in a self-denying kind of way. Rather, it's the love that flows from the self in way that allows you to be more fully who God has created you to be. It's a love

that isn't jealous or selfish. Rather, it's a love that is gracious and ever-patient. It's a love that is generous and humble. It is the love that we have received from our God.

Well, there it is, friends, today's readings have revealed something important about our God. We have a God who has disclosed what love looks like. A love that is equitable for all. A love that is self-less and truth filled. A never-ending love given to us so that we might give it to another. Amen.