

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 01/30/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, January 30th

Luke 4:21-30

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable

The Gospel lection from last week implied Jesus had already become known for His teaching (4:14). The text told of Jesus reading from Isaiah in the synagogue on the sabbath in his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus then proclaimed He was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy – that He was able to offer salvation. In essence, Jesus proclaimed His identity and the blueprint for His ministry (4:14-21). This week's lection contains the second part of the text which reveals how the audience in the synagogue reacted. This text challenges us to reflect on how we react to this message. Are we much different than Jesus' original audience?

Luke 4:21-30 Commentary

²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

The initial reaction of the synagogue audience was one of amazement. The audience was unanimous. Yet while the audience were amazed at what they heard; they did not believe in their hearts what He said. They doubted – "Is not this Joseph's son?" The incongruity between the words and the person they had known all his life. Of course, the reader of Luke already knows Jesus is really the Son of God (Luke 3:22).

²³ And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Physician, heal yourself." What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." ²⁴ And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.

Jesus quotes a proverb (one not found in Proverbs but is like others found in Jewish literature). Some commentators suggest the meaning of this proverb is Jesus should first give evidence of His mission before asserting it. Such would compare "Physician, heal yourself" to the taunts and similar skepticism Jesus will later receive while hanging on the cross (Luke 23:35): *And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"* Jesus perceives what the people are thinking (See also Luke 5:22; 6:8; 7:40; 9:47; 11:17). The people expect Jesus to do the same miracles in His hometown of Nazareth that He did in Capernaum. They want proof! Jesus lets the people know that He knows what they are thinking. By the statement, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown", Luke simultaneously identified Jesus as a prophet and foretells His rejection in His hometown.

²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

Like an Old Testament prophet, Jesus also confronts with God's Word. He describes the brutal reality of what He saw. He selected two prophetic stories involving the famous prophets Elijah and Elisha. Of all the examples He could have chosen He selected two that involve prophetic ministry to people that were not part of Israel. In doing this, Jesus reminded them that when Israel rejects God's prophets He sends them elsewhere, even to Gentiles.

²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away.

The response from the audience went from amazement to wrath! Just like the initial reaction was unanimous amazement, *all were filled with wrath*. Jesus' rejection was complete - they attempted to take Him to the brow of the hill and throw Him off the cliff. Is this a foreshadowing of how Jesus' ministry will eventually lead Him to the cross? Some commentators claim Jesus' escape here should be considered a miracle.

Reflections

Jesus' message offended His own people two thousand years ago. What part of the message proved to be the problem? When Jesus proclaimed He was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (vv. 18-19, 21), the audience perhaps saw themselves as the poor, as the captives and oppressed under Roman rule. Jesus' interpretation of His ministry as one of inclusivity and universality shifts the crowd from awe to rage. After all, the Jews saw themselves as God's people. The problem was the implied universality of Jesus' message.

Today, the idea of the universal need for salvation and the universality of Christ are core to Christianity, yet to what extent does the institutional church suffer from the same myopia as Jesus' hometown people? To what extent do we feel entitled to Jesus – that Jesus is for the Christians? We certainly expect Jesus to intercede on our behalf to get our will done in heaven but to what extent have we dedicated our lives to be part of Jesus' mission to accomplish God's will on earth? To what extent have we replaced the outward-looking universality of Christ's mission with inward-looking Christian denominationalism or legalistic or humanistic interpretations of the Gospel?

The crowd responded to Jesus' confrontational message by trying to throw Him off a cliff. The Gospel still afflicts the comfortable today. Are we in danger of throwing Jesus' Words off a cliff in our time to preserve the status quo? COVID has transitioned our world from secular, post-Christian to one that is emerging as post-secular. People's spiritual needs are not being met. Humanism has taken on the status of religion. Many Christians appear to have jettisoned Jesus as salvation to adopt a new religion of COVID legalism which has a remarkable similarity to the Jewish religiosity of Jesus' day. Many in the church have accepted the notion that it is blasphemy to question the establishment's superstitious beliefs about masks, vaccines, and lockdowns, despite data to the contrary. Yet any blasphemy must be canceled. At least this is a lot less messy than stoning. While Jesus abolished the Jewish purity laws, modern-day Pharisees have resurrected clean versus unclean people based on vaccination status. The vaccine is salvation and mask-wearing the outward sign of belief. The church is eerily quiet as zealous, hate-filled voices in our society talk of exclusion of the unvaccinated. Their evangelistic practices embrace forced vaccinations, the removal of children from unvaccinated parents, and internment camps for the unvaccinated.