

Epiphany 4-January 30, 2022

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Luke 4:16-30

“Why the Rage?”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen

How could things go so wrong at a worship service? One minute the people are raving at the gracious words of the preacher and the next minute they are raging mad and want to put the preacher to death. This is what happened when Jesus came back to his hometown and when he concluded, “No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.”

Jesus was right, preaching in his hometown was part of the problem. But it was not all of the problem. If Nazareth was the only place where Jesus’ gracious words were not welcomed, he not only would have narrowly escaped the efforts of his hometown people to put him to death, but he would have been able to avoid his crucifixion as well. But after Jesus left Nazareth, Jesus continued to proclaim the good news to the poor and proclaim release to those captivated by their sins in other places and once again, the good news was not always well received.

Jesus was doing what he was supposed to be doing on this sabbath. He wasn’t being accused of restoring sight to a blind man on the sabbath. Jesus wasn’t confronted about his disciples’ plucking grains of wheat from the fields on the sabbath. Jesus simply went to the synagogue as his parents had taught him to do. You can see some similarities of what happened on this sabbath day and what we still do today. Scriptures are read. A sermon is delivered. And then as the preacher greets people by shaking hands at the end of worship and people as they are sent home, you find out if what they heard accused them or freed them.

It doesn’t say if Jesus wanted to read the lesson for today or if he was chosen to read like I sometimes do just by looking at someone in the congregation and pointing to the bulletin and then to the lectern and they know I would like them to read. In any event, someone pulled the scroll of Isaiah off the shelf and handed it to Jesus. After handing Jesus the scroll, they left it up to him to choose the verses to read. Jesus, knowing both the scriptures and the people of his hometown so well, knew exactly what scripture these people should hear that day. Jesus rolled through nearly all of Isaiah until he found what we identify as the 61st chapter. These people had heard these words before. They may have had a little trouble with Jesus from the start when Jesus declared that the Spirit of the Lord is upon ME. They had understood this scripture to mean that the spirit of the Lord was up on Isaiah, but did this hometown woodworker mean that he too had been given the spirit?

The scripture that Jesus read is about as full of good news as Jesus could find in the scroll of Isaiah. There were no demands from God for these people to follow. Only words of what God would do for them. When Jesus rolled up the scroll, he noticed that everyone’s eyes were fixed on him. Then Jesus sent his sermon to another place on their body. Jesus aimed his sermon at their ears. Jesus made the crowd of listeners even more happy since he delivered a short sermon. A really short sermon when

he said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." After these few words, we are told that everyone was amazed at the wonderful choice of scripture and Jesus' few words. This time of amazement however lasted about as long as his sermon. Then someone from the crowd said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

With that comment, Jesus started speaking again. Jesus knew what the people were thinking. They had heard enough from Jesus and preferred to see him do something like heal someone who was nearly dead or turn water into wine and I don't think they would even have noticed it was the sabbath. But Jesus didn't give them what they wanted to see, he opened his mouth and continued to speak.

Jesus could tell how the gospel was functioning in the hearts of his hometown people. Hearing the good news was fine, but they didn't really want to hear it from Jesus, and they didn't want him spreading it to others. You might think that if Jesus knew that his words were starting to enrage his listeners, he would tell them something that they wanted to hear. But Jesus added more fuel to their fire by using two examples from the Old Testament where he said there was only one widow of many in the town of Zarephath that received good news and there was only one leper among the many lepers named Naaman who was healed from Syria. When Jesus described how only two people who were given mercy, but didn't do anything to receive it, the crowd had heard enough and were ready to run Jesus off a cliff.

I had a similar homecoming experience last Sunday. I was invited to preach for a funeral for a former teacher from Tri-Valley last week. Tri-Valley is where Kim and I and our family went to school and later served on the school board. But already several years have passed since we had those connections, so it was at little like a homecoming. The funeral was even held in the school to accommodate the potential number of people that might attend. It was interesting, because I experienced some of the same responses that Jesus did when he returned home to preach.

I heard some people say, "I didn't know you became a preacher." Someone much younger than me came up and asked, "You're Sarah's dad, aren't you?" I heard another say, "It was nice that I could do this for the family". Another person who had gone to a bible college commented that he heard an atonement doctrine in my message. But there was only one person who came up to me and told me that the sermon really spoke to him.

This is how God's word works. God's gracious words are sometimes well received at first, until you hear that these same words of forgiveness also are for those who you don't think deserve to hear them. When that happens, you would rather Jesus do some kind of a trick for you, or you might quit listening to him completely. But the good news is that Jesus does not place a limit on the number of times you can attempt to reject him. His unconditional gracious words will be spoken again and again or by a different preacher until you believe they are for you.

The gospel for today ends with the words, "But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way." This is good news for you and me. Jesus went on his way from Nazareth and has arrived here at Baltic Lutheran/East Nidaros or to someone listening on-line today and is delivering good news to you. Jesus declares to you, "Today, this scripture, this good news, has been fulfilled in your hearing." Amen