

Luke 4:21-30
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“Love like Jesus”

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“So goes the life of a prophet and preacher,” we might say as we observe Jesus’ hometown crowd react to his prophetic message.

In the verses just prior to this we hear the opening of Jesus’ sermon to his hometown people and he has them in the palm of his hand. He says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me!” “Yes” the crowd replies, “we knew he was special.” I was made to “bring good news to the poor.” “Yes” they reply. I am here to “bring release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free.” And in that town where many felt captive, blind and oppressed they respond, “Yes! Yes! Yes!”

But we know how things can change when we come back home, but we are a different person than when we left. For most of Jesus’ sermon the people hear themselves in the hope of his message. They pray he has come home to release them, bring good news to them, set them free. But when Jesus gets more specific we begin to see why the crowd went from jolly to melancholy so quickly.

Jesus refers to the OT story of Elijah miraculously healing a widow and her son. Problem is, Elijah had to pass by many Jewish widows with sick children to heal the widow of Zarephath and her son, who were foreigners. He refers to Elisha’s healing of Naaman, a prominent leader in an enemy army. To heal General Naaman Elisha had to pass by many Jewish leaders who needed healing. Jesus continues getting in deep water by talking about healing people with Leprosy when right there in front of him was his hometown neighbors needing healing.

Upon the ears of this crowd who assumed they would benefit from Joseph’s son’s newly acquired healing powers, these examples of God’s healing going to outsiders caused major unrest. Was he going to pass them by like Elijah and Elisha did their Jewish neighbors? Secondly and more deeply, the crowd started to realize this was a call for them to love foreigners and enemies treating them as family and townsfolk. This message, then and now, when spelled out for Jesus’ followers, rarely rests well.

Like that ancient crowd, we get frustrated when Jesus talks like this. Why does he do it? Maybe he wants to wake us from our tunnel vision.

Recently I read an article titled, “Touch-Sensitive Dress Reveals Staggering Level of Sexual Harassment at Clubs.” The article continued, “To highlight the problem, an ad agency sent three women wearing a touch-sensitive dress to a nightclub in São Paulo, Brazil, to record how often they were groped over the course of almost four hours. The agency—which conducted the experiment... asked men on a night out whether they thought women really faced widespread sexual harassment in bars. Some men... said they didn’t think women experience major problems with harassment.

But data collected by the touch-sensitive dress painted a different picture. Researchers found the women were touched 157 times over three hours and 47 minutes—that's more than 40 times per hour.

That is staggering to me. I would not have been so naïve as to suggest Sexual harassment at dance clubs was not an issue, but I also would not have ever guessed the staggering number of times per hour those women got groped.

So why didn't Jesus stop while he was ahead with the crowd? Those words about release to the captives, liberty for the oppressed, good news for the poor all sounded great to the Jewish people living powerless in the face of foreign powers which occupied their land. They felt unseen, unheard, with dim hope. But Jesus does not intend to diminish their sufferings, but he is warning them about tunnel vision. Tunnel Vision is when we get so focused on our problems, or our family's problems that we cannot see anyone else's. Jesus doesn't want the crowd to forget others people who feel unseen, unheard, and powerless.

In the first Chapter of Genesis from The Message version we hear, "God spoke: 'Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.' God created human beings;... created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. God created them male and female.

When people are not treated as fully human, they are not being treated as God created them. Precious gifts molded by the very hand of God. Indeed, Jesus assures his hometown God had not forgotten their sufferings; but he also assures them God had not forgotten any who are suffering, and neither should they.

So, to live his words, to demonstrate his solidarity, Jesus the hometown insider, beloved son of Galilee, became Jesus the despised outsider. It happened in a flash. He became the very kind of person he was asking the people of his hometown to love. And instead, they were ready to throw him off a cliff.

God calls you and me to participate in Jesus' narrative of bold love, a story based in ancient truth but new in each generation. I invite you to think of that friend on social media you have blocked, that group of people who stand for a side in a social issue with which you deeply disagree. Or those you think are a lost cause. I am not saying unblock them or take their side, or run out there and save them. But I think Jesus is inviting us to consider how we might begin, in small ways to understand them, build solidarity with them, and help restore one another's fully God gifted humanity. How might we grow to love without conditions, one we find hard to love.

I invite you to a spiritual practice, here on this communion Sunday where we gather in Jesus' name to proclaim his table open to all who seek God's love, unity and peace, I invite you to fill

in the blank quietly to yourself with a person or group who has crossed your mind... "The Body and blood of Christ were given for ..._____." Yes Them!

Let us pray, "Christ Jesus, you loved everyone whom you met. Sometimes it meant comforting love, other times it meant tough love, other times you rejoiced in love... but you never excluded anyone from God's overflowing love. Help us to grow as we learn to love as boldly and completely as You. In the name of the One who came to preach your love to all who are poor, or poor in spirit, all who are captive, or caught up in ourselves, all who oppress and are oppressed, we pray... may your Spirit O God, broaden our hearts.

Amen