

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"We're NOT God's Only Concern: God shows favor to people we don't like"

Scripture: Luke 4:14-30

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January 17, 2020

Theme: God loves the people we hate

Songs/Hymns: Opener: #118 -- Hark the glad sound, #374 Closer: Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing (tune:

Asmond) Choruses: Jesus loves me, this I know 373 (CCLI), How great is our God

Have you ever wished someone ill?

Wished that they caught a cold

Or were passed over for promotion.

Wished that would be audited

Or that their brakes would fail.

Have you ever wished someone ill?

Have you ever found yourself

calling down curses on a rival

or sticking pins into their picture.

Maybe.

Maybe not.

Not all of us are spiteful by nature.

But I think that most of us,

I think that most of feel we deserve a divine favor

When we are placed head-to-head with our opponents.

I mean we call ourselves God's 'children'.

Being God's children has got to count for something,

shouldn't it?

PAUSE

Today we are continuing our journey through the Gospel of Luke.

In the introduction of Luke's Gospel,

Luke notes his intent to compose a carefully investigated

And orderly account of the many stories of Jesus

That were floating around during his time.

Now this shouldn't make us think

That Luke is simply compiling stories or

Making some neutral, disinterested entry for Jesus

In the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Luke has his own purposes.

The commentator Fred Craddock puts it best
 When he speaks of Luke as a preacher with 'a historian's eye'.ⁱ

That is while Luke pays attention to times and places
 He makes them subservient to his broader themes.ⁱⁱ

PAUSE

Today we return to Luke's Gospel.
 We begin after Jesus' baptism
 And after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

We are told that Jesus has been busy
 Travelling the synagogue circuit,
 Impressing people with good preaching.

We are told that Jesus eventually winds up
 back in his old stomping grounds,
 his hometown of Nazareth.

As per usual he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath.
 And given his growing prominence
 He is invited to read the Scriptures and preach.

When Jesus is handed the scroll from Isaiah,
 He finds and then reads
 a passage about restoration and blessing,
 A passage about Good News and freedom.

And then he launches into his sermon, declaring:
 "You've just heard Scripture make history.
 It came true just now in this place."ⁱⁱⁱ

The people are impressed.
 Their nation has been under Roman Rule
 Since Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 BCE.

In *their* minds, Jesus is speaking
 About the political restoration of their nation.

But more than that, he seems to be suggesting
 That *he* is the instrument of this restoration.

If the rumors are true about the miracles he's been performing,
 Certainly, they too will see some evidence,
 Some demonstration of his power
 To back up what he is saying.

But the crowd's excitement fades as Jesus continues his sermon.

He seems to read their minds
 and understand their expectations.
 As the hometown boy done good elsewhere,
 He knows they want him to take care of his own!^{iv}

But this is where Jesus challenges them.

Yes, he had been doing lots healing and miracles in Capernaum,
 A multicultural waypoint
 on a trade-route between Egypt and Syria.^v

But this wasn't just some lead-up
 for a big show among his own people.
 God's bigger purpose
 Has always been to bless the nations of the world.

And so Jesus reminds his listeners of some important stories
 In their own sacred texts:
 Elijah and the widow,
 and Elisha and Naaman.

Both stories speak of "of God's [favor to outsiders]."

In a drought-stricken, famine-ridden land of many widows,
 God designated but one, a nonbeliever,
 to make known both God's presence and God's power.

In the life-giving healing of the widow's son,
 God far surpasses the miraculous,
 life-giving food provided the widow,
 her family, and Elijah,

and thereby prompts the joyous exclamation of her belief.

Likewise God's healing of the Syrian Naaman's leprosy—
 again, in the midst of many who likewise suffered in Israel—
 manifests this pattern...

The commander of the army of Syria, a "mighty man of valor,"
 learned of Elisha from a young woman
 he had captured from Israel to serve his wife.

With a cache of silver and gold,
 and preceded by a kingly letter for safe passage,
 he "stood at the door" (2 Kgs. 5:9 KJV) of Elisha's house
 only to be rebuffed by a messenger

telling him to wash seven times in the Jordan.

Angered, and then cajoled by his servants,
Naaman relented, bathed, was healed,
and was won over to God.”^{vi}

Bringing up these stories,
Gives the Jesus’ Jewish listeners *another* lens
Through which to understand that passage of promise
from Isaiah.

But Jesus’ interpretation causes offence.

As one commentator notes:

“In the minds of the Jewish listeners,
it was offense enough to be reminded
that Elijah ministered to a poor Gentile widow,

but it was intolerable to be oppressed by Roman occupation
and then be reminded that Elisha healed a soldier of Syria,
a country which had oppressed Israel in an earlier time.”

The commentator continues:

“What makes all of this preaching so “unacceptable”
is that the people of Jesus’ time expected Messiah
to come and destroy Israel’s enemies,
not to minister to them...”^{vii}

Jesus challenges how Isaiah is to be understood by the people.
And in doing so, Jesus challenges their understanding of God.

They thought the Lord of heaven and earth
Was their own tribal deity
Whose primary concern was them, God’s people.

Jesus challenges them to consider
That God’s concern and God’s mission is much broader
Than they had ever imagined
And includes their enemies too.

This is all too much for them to swallow.

And so, in an act normally meant to defend God’s honor
But now twisted to defend their own,
They seek to stone Jesus,
by throwing him off a cliff.

PAUSE

We are witnessing all sorts of fragmentation
 Within the church and within society.

We have rivals, sometimes enemies
 making different arguments and assertions
 about social responsibility,
 individual liberty,
 and human sexuality.

Like all people we are partial
 To our own understandings.

But on top of this, we seem to think
 That God's favor is for us alone,
 that God is on our side.

Could it be that God wants to bless our enemies,
 Just like he wanted to bless the Gentiles in Jesus' day?

PAUSE

I wonder what would happen in Kamloops
 If all of us Christians determined to bless our rivals
 Rather than cursing them or
 waiting for God to give us an advantage over them.

Maybe we'd see something of that
 'year of God's favor'
 That Jesus himself proclaimed.

To God be all the glory. Amen.

ⁱ Fred Craddock *Luke 2*

ⁱⁱ Jesus' ministry starts in the more intercultural Capernaum in Luke vs the backcountry Nazareth in Matthew, suggesting Jesus' gospel is has a broader, international focus.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 4:21 MSG

^{iv} The proverb "Physician, heal yourself!" means that the healer or benefactor (in this case Jesus) should take care of his own... If Jesus pronounced that the Isaiah passage was truly fulfilled, then all could expect him to do wonderful things for them. Craig A. Evans "Luke 4:21-30" *The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels* 325

^v See Karen Engle "Why Did Jesus Choose to Live in Capernaum?" January 17, 2019 blog.logos.com/why-did-jesus-choose-to-live-in-capernaum/#easy-footnote-bottom-2-94737

^{vi} Ostendorf, D. L. (2009). *Theological Perspective on Luke 4:21–30*. In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year C* (Vol. 1, pp. 308–310). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

^{vii} Craig A. Evans "Luke 4:21-30" *The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels* 326