

Luke 4:22-30

First impressions are dangerous. We never see a whole person right away.

This morning we see a whole synagogue full of people find out that the Jesus they have in their head is not the person he really is.

Let's listen again to the story.

It is a sunny day at the synagogue. Jesus has come home. He has chosen to read from Isaiah 61. And then he says "Today!" "This has come true right in front of you, right now".

"I am setting prisoners free, I am opening the eyes of the blind".

All the people bore witness to the words of grace that were proceeding from his mouth. (Literally translated)

"Proceeding from his mouth"

Where have we heard that phrase before?

We may know it best from the song, "Seek Ye First."

"We do not live by bread alone, but by **every** word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew)

They loved the words of grace that were proceeding from Jesus' mouth. He is the Son of God after all. Those words of grace and hope and forgiveness and promise are words we love to live by. Much harder, but just as necessary are the hard words that are proceeding from Jesus' mouth today.

I imagine the synagogue alive with the women fanning themselves and murmuring... (well! Well!, My, My!, Amen! (Jesus grew up in a black synagogue ☺)

But even as everyone was basking in these words of grace, some began to murmur. He was so familiar to them, so ordinary, and so poor. They wondered, “can’t he see himself?”

Good news for the poor?

Prisoners free?

Open blind eyes?

And they remember his dad, the poor carpenter who barely kept his family fed. And finally they say to each other, “isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

We hear them ask the question, and because we have been **listening** to the story and are not in it, we say, “No!”

(let’s say that together, I’ll give you the cue)

“Isn’t this Joseph’s son”

(Together) : NO!!

This is the anointed Son of God and when he said “Today” he was not joking. Without asking their permission, he begins the work of setting **them** free from their pre-conceived ideas about what it means to be part of God’s work in his world.

He begins to open eyes that are blind and he brings relief for the oppressed.

This is what Jesus is really doing here.

He knows these people well, he has grown up among them. He sees the narrowing eyes and pursed lips, he sees self-satisfaction, he reads them like a scroll.

With great courage Jesus says out loud what they are thinking.

“Physician, heal yourself!”

“From where we sit Jesus, you look like you could use some saving of your own”.

“Can’t you see how shabby you look?”

“What are you Jesus, blind?”

It’s like a financial planner who comes to your home with a promise of great returns, but he shows up riding a borrowed bicycle. (Physician, heal yourself!)

But... if Jesus can prove that the Spirit has anointed him, maybe do the things that they’ve heard he did in Capernaum.... (Capernaum was the town where a lot of non-Jewish people lived. People from other cultures, other faith, other stories.)

Well, Jesus does prove it.

In the power of the Spirit he tells them two stories.

“Elijah and the widow of Zarephath”.

“Elisha and Naaman the leper from Syria”.

Elijah and Elisha are two prophets who served in the power of the Spirit of the Lord. The king of Israel rejected Elijah and drove him away. The king of Israel forgot

all about Elisha and ignored him. He didn't even think of consulting him when a man from powerful Syria came looking for a miracle.

Two deep stories of God's own people rejecting God's own prophet. God shows his unstoppable power and love for all people.

Everyone in the synagogue knew "Elijah and the widow", and "Elisha and Naaman."

There are stories that live in **us** that are so strong that a single word can puncture us and force us to see what we would never admit.

Here is what I mean. Imagine that on a Saturday morning you and your neighbour Steve are both leaning on your snow shovels. You mention that you have mixed feelings about the way your neighbourhood is changing. Different people are moving in, they wear different clothes, they eat different foods, they live with whole extended families. It's not the way it used to be.

Your neighbour looks you in the eye and says one word, "Hitler".

And your submerged racism lies exposed on the sidewalk.

Everyone in the synagogue knew Elijah and the widow and Elisha and Naaman.

With these two stories Jesus punctures their pride and their confidence that being the people of God meant all was good for them.

When Jesus calls us to be at work in the mission of setting people free, his first order of business is to go to work on us. He opens our eyes to see the kind of Saviour that he actually is. He is not just 'gentle Jesus meek and mild', he is also 'dangerous

Jesus, fierce and wild'. He loves enough to open our eyes to the truth about ourselves that may be destroying those around us, instead of setting them free.

We can respond in two ways to the Saviour who loves us like this.

1. We can respond with repentance and throw ourselves on Jesus' mercy. We can accept that we are guilty as charged, and turn and follow him, getting busy where and how he calls us. We can 'pour contempt on all our pride'. That was Paul's response when Jesus stopped him on the Damascus road. That was Peter's response when Jesus questioned him on the beach. The crowd on that first Pentecost Sunday was 'cut to the heart and asked, 'brothers, what shall we do?' 'Turn around, be baptized, follow this Jesus'.

Jesus does not always show us our pride as directly as he does with the people in his hometown. Or, maybe he does, but we work very hard to plug our ears and drown out what he is trying to teach us. Still, even when we try to manage our lives, or try to define what it is to be his follower on our own terms, Jesus never gives up. The moment he sets us free may feel like the worst moment in our lives, when we give up our pride and let Jesus lead us.

2. The second way of responding when Jesus punctures our pride is the way of anger, and hatred. As here. These people explode with rage at the audacity of this preacher to put his finger on such a sensitive and personal place. They've made an idol out of their status as God's people. It is easy to do. I remember the moment that I realized that I was proud of our Reformed theology, that it was stronger and more coherent and more thoughtful than that of other churches. I looked down on others and felt sorry for them. And then, I realized/God pointed

out how absurd it is to be proud of a theology that says, “I am a sinner saved only by grace”.

We have the capacity to make idols out of anything. But remember Jonah? “Those who cling to worthless idols, turn their backs on the grace that could be theirs.” (Jonah 2:8)

Whenever, in our pride or anger we cling to an idol, we turn our backs on the grace and love and healing power that Jesus wants us to know.

The people rise up in anger and throw Jesus out of the city. They want to throw him off a cliff onto the rocks below. It is apparently just as effective as throwing the rocks at the person.

They led him out.

As you read Luke during Lent, pay attention whenever Jesus is being led somewhere.

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness.

The devil led him twice to tempt him.

In Nazareth, all the people led Jesus.

(Jesus warns his followers that they will be led before kings).

He is seized and led away to trial. He is led before the chief priests.

The whole multitude led him before Pilate. They led him away to crucify him.

Two other men were led away to be crucified with him.

Is Luke saying that to try to lead Jesus, to get ahead of him, is the height of pride and is part of crucifying him? It is a hard question and one that anyone trying to do good in Jesus' name needs to consider.

“They led him out to throw him to the rocks. But he passed through their midst and went on his way. His way is the way of his mission. It is the way of his work to take all of the pain of pride and rejection and anger and hatred **into himself**, where it will die with him on the cross. He dies there. He is buried. Three days later he rises from the grave.

Luke ends his gospel with these words from Jesus:

“I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

And **he led them out** as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them.... (4:1,4:5,9,29, 21:12,22:54, 22:66, 23:1, 23:26, 32, 24:50)

It is the **only way**, let Jesus lead us into new life, and let us all humbly follow him.

The Lord be gracious to you. The Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.