

“AND YOUR ANSWER IS ...”

Luke 4:14-30

Intro

As we look at the Gospel of Luke, what we are about to hear represents, in many ways, Jesus' coming out party.

In the preceding chapter and a half, we have been introduced to John the Baptist, watched and listened as Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, and then walked with the man from Nazareth as he went into the wilderness for forty days and was tempted by the Devil. Jesus emerges from this time, not only of temptation, but also of being in the closer presence of his Father, the Almighty, filled with the Holy Spirit, and he does what so many of us would do: he heads to an area that he knows intimately: Galilee; he heads home.

To put it into a context that makes sense to us, think of Galilee like Hunterdon county. It is in these familiar communities of that the empowered Jesus begins his ministry by teaching in the houses of worship in this part of the county; so he starts out in Flemington, Clinton, Sommerville (and all points in-between!). Word begins to spread of Jesus and the authority with which he speaks.

It is after this positive buildup that Jesus then makes his way to southern Galilee, to his literal home of Nazareth (think...I don't know, Lambertville). These are the people who have known him almost his entire life. They have helped to raise this boy into a man.

And now, here he is speaking to them, teaching, imploring his friends and neighbors to understand that the Creator of all is, and always should be, the focus of our lives, whether that be in our religious life, or our secular life. In a moment, we'll hear how those folks respond to such a message.

The question that I have for you is this: when you think of your own life, to whom do you belong? The scripture reads this way.

Luke 4:14-30

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his

mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"²³ He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'"²⁴ And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown."²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land;²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

"And Your Answer Is..."

Many of us hear this passage and we have the reaction of, "what's the big deal here? Why is everyone getting so angry? What did Jesus say that is getting the people riled up to the point of pushing Jesus off a cliff?" Recognize that Jesus friends and neighbors are looking to kill him.

Not exactly the warmest of welcome home celebrations.

To get into the passage, there are a few, let's call them, sacred cows that Jesus has tread upon.

The first is the choice of his reading from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This is one of the messianic texts that people would hear and immediately connect to a leader coming into the community who will conquer the forces of oppression that are upon them. Jesus proclaims that text, and then in a wonderfully visual piece of literary theater, "he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down" with all "the eyes of all in the synagogue ... fixed upon him."

Jesus, who is carrying a lot of emotional momentum due to the word of mouth that has already begun to generate in the greater part of Galilee, then pushes the room even farther by stating, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus is saying, "the Divine relief that was spoken of in Isaiah is here,... and it is me."

Jesus drops the mic.

Those who are listening are initially excited.

After all, the people of Israel were looking for relief. Someone says they're going to offer that relief and you're going to get excited.

But the inevitable doubts arise: “wait a minute. We know this guy. This is Joseph’s kid. Joseph’s a good guy, but he’s only a carpenter...he’s Joseph! He is not someone who is going to be able to ‘deliver the year of the Lord’s favor’.

The vibe of the space has begun to shift. Preconceptions that lead to doubt and disbelief begin to radiate from person to person.

The way that Luke writes the scene out, Jesus senses the doubt, ...and promptly adds fuel to the fire, not because what he says is untrue, but because what he is saying is becoming horribly unpopular, forcing those who are listening to try and digest the fact that God is not confined to the ways that we want. But instead that God has moved in the past, and is moving again, in a way that goes against conventional wisdom.

What Jesus does is bring up two examples that remind the people of this fact.

He brings up how there was a three and a half year period of famine. Elijah was not sent by God to help the Israelites, but instead a Gentile.

Elisha is then referenced in that there were many lepers in his day. Many of these lepers were children of Israel. And yet, God did not call Elisha to heal them, but instead to heal a foreigner from the north: Naaman a military general from Syria.

Are you surprised that neither of these examples are all that popular with the people of Jesus day? Exactly!

But Jesus isn’t trying to be popular: he is trying to articulate the truth that is of God. Jesus is saying to those in his hometown of Nazareth that God is in charge. How God may move, and how God may Call, may be in direct conflict with the wisdom of the day, but that does not mean that God is not moving or calling for steps to be taken in an ‘antithetical’ direction.

In fact, what that Divine call means is that the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of the church, the wisdom of the way we individually see the world and ourselves in the world working, may need to be adjusted, if not out and out changed.

As we can tell for our scripture reading this morning, the folks in Nazareth, were not ready to do that, and not only did they chase out of town the one who would be the savior of the world, they wanted to kill him. They were not willing to change, or even modify what they understood to be wisdom, what they understood to be true. They wanted to crush the voice of change. It didn’t matter that it was also a voice of God. In doing so, they showed to whom they belong.

So, using the scripture as our springboard into the here and now, when you think of your life, to whom does it belong? I know that many of us live have lived, at least in some part, in a place where we act, if not out and out think, ‘it’s my life!’

And that’s not necessarily a bad thing to think...but is that the end of the thought?

So I’m going to use a churchy example (not exactly the best illustrative material...but maybe it will lead us there).

The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism (which is an educational tool to explain what we believe about God and why we should) states the following in its question and answer format: Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death? A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

How do you hear that? How does that make you feel?

My hunch is that there are a few of us who hear that and think, ‘that’s so true! That’s what I believe!’

My hunch is that there are a few more of us who hear that and think, ‘that’s so true! But I am nowhere near actually following through in terms of living a life that exemplifies that (or however that may sound in your non-minister-y words!).’

My hunch is that there are a few of us who hear that and think, ‘Jesus is important...but what I just heard the minister say is going over the top.’

That’s my hunch.

Let me assure you that regardless of where you find yourself (and that absolutely includes all of us who find ourselves somewhere in between one of those archetypal examples), that’s okay: God can handle it!

What I do invite you to engage in though (which is what the neighbors from Nazareth ultimately did not), is actively inviting the Spirit of God into your life so that you are able to see if how you answer the question of ‘to whom does your life belong’, needs to begin the process of changing, growing, developing (the describer will differ for each of us).

‘I belong, body and soul, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.’

So what’s your answer? To whom do you belong? Our passage showed people who belonged to themselves or, at the very least, their history...and that missed the place that God invited them to abide. I pray that through our words, our actions, and our very being we are able to declare in ways that are very familiar and ways that are anything but, that we belong to God and God alone.

Invite Him in...and be open to the leading that will begin to reveal itself.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious Lord, as we have seen exemplified for us in our scripture this morning, it can be so very easy to lose sight of You by focusing upon that which makes us feel comfortable, and affirmed. God, shake us from this repose, and implore us upon a path that radically depends

upon You and You alone. You have said from the beginning that if we placed our trust in You that You would care for us. Help each of us to take that step in regards to our lives so that everything that we do begins to focus ever more clearly upon You and You alone. Lord, empower us to be Your people. Amen.