

Luke 4:21-30

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 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?" 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.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 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; yet Elijah was sent to noon of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many keepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 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. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

There Is A Battle Of Two Wolves Inside Us All



One is evil. It is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, lies, inferiority and ego.

The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth.

The wolf that wins? The one you feed.

-Cherokee Proverb

"What is Acceptable and What is Not"

But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way
Luke 4:30

When Jesus visited his hometown of Nazareth he was invited to read and to interpret scripture to his neighborly family of Jews. News had come to them that the Spirit of God was strong in the man Jesus and miracles had happened with him. The scripture that Jesus chose to read outlined the agenda which he would be following in his prophetic work of social justice. In our better moments when the church has followed and been empowered by the grace of Christ, countless human wrongs have been spiritually righted in society. So, today, as we hear how that dramatic visit ended, it is important to keep in mind one thing that Jesus left out of his agenda that Isaiah had included in God's 'to-do' list. What did he leave out? What would the hometown never see happening in Christ Jesus? . . . 'the day of vengeance of our God'. I am not sure what the word vengeance meant in Hebrew or in the Aramaic language of Jesus but in our language it means: punishment inflicted or retribution exacted for an injury or wrong; payback.

But before getting to the ending we must go back to the beginning when the hometown crowd loved the prophetic words of scriptural promise that Jesus read out loud to them. In that moment, Luke recorded that, 'All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth' (4:22a). In their moment of believing that the Lord had graced their hometown with Almighty Presence they praised God saying: With great mercy, God is remembering us. With huge love, God is choosing us as Beloved Children! With great power, the Almighty will save us from harm! With compassion God will heal us with a touch! Another fatted calf in the backyard! The blessing of another male child! Healing to Uncle Abraham's nephew who couldn't shake the leprosy! A favorable growing season! Erasing my credit card debt!

But just as his acceptance had hit an all time high, someone asked that bubble bursting question, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” (4:22b) Then, when Jesus challenged their misinterpretation of his mission agenda (God is here for us and only us) with lines from their own wisdom scripture. ‘Doubtless’, Jesus said, ‘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” (Luke 4:23) . . . his acceptance rating took a nose dive. After that, it quickly turned into downright rejection (with no hope of comeback) when he told two upsetting scriptural stories about the time when the Spirit of Inclusive Love refused to let God’s chosen people keep the Almighty in their back pockets for their own use.

The first story he re-told came from the book of 1 Kings 17. In that story, God sent the prophet Elijah to a widow in Sidon to feed a non-Jewish, no account woman---in a time when people in Israel were starving to death. In their hearing of it, fear, pain, and anger welled up from the depth of their hometown bones, shouting out in jealous rage the truth of what they all felt: ‘she (an unfaithful) got what was rightfully ours!’ The second story from Kings 5:1-17 was about the time when God sent the prophet Elisha to Syria to heal the diseased leper and despised foreigner Naaman . . . a man they feared and hated. They just could not wrap their heads around it. Why would God heal a man who has done them harm? Why didn’t God keep them safe by destroying, rather than healing the man with the power to squash them like bugs? Translations of Luke’s recording of the moment differ. One reads: ‘All the people in the synagogue were furious when they feared this.’ Another reads: ‘When they heard this, all in the synagogue, all were filled with rage’.

In his book, ‘Manifesting God’, Thomas Keating (priest, author, and founder of the Centering Prayer movement) named some basic human needs that, if fed, can fuel the rage of rejection. His list includes the instinctual needs of survival and security, affection and esteem, and power and control’ (p. 76). As he understands it, all of these are good and necessary for our growth and development as a unique human being.’ The

problem’, Keating explained, ‘is when any one or all of them gets scared and demands too much attention . . . and is hungry all the time.’ Tragically, when rejection rage fuels our shaky ego, it strikes with the power to lower our shields of impulse control and to open the flood gate of violent behavior. So, when the hometown Jews felt rejected by God and Jesus, ‘They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was build, so that they might hurl him off the cliff’ (28-29).

“But he passed through the midst of them . . .” Most biblical scholars at this part of the story make the comment that: It is important to note here that Jesus does not go elsewhere because he is rejected, he is rejected because he is saying that he is going elsewhere. Equally important, however, is to note that in Jesus’ frightening moment of being violently rejected, he chose a non-violent response. Because he did, Christian spiritual activists have been inspired to do the same in their struggle for justice and peace: Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King Jr., John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas. “. . . and went on his way.’ Another thing of note here is that he did not come back to do vengeful payback.

There are lots of things that we can take-away from this gospel story to aid us in our spiritual journey of blossoming into the fullness of our humanity in the likeness Jesus. But it’s also Epiphany, the church’s time for catching a glimpse of The Holy One as revealed in the person of Jesus, so that any misconceptions of God that we might have internalized can be challenged and transformed. So, after hearing this Jesus story of acceptance and rejection, what do you think? Does the Holy Spirit transform violent hearts in a non-violent way? If so, by what grace? Does God refuse to enact vengeance on those who reject the Spirit of Inclusive Love? If so, by what grace?

Thank you, Jesus-God-Spirit who is Holy on us for anointing us with your amazing love. You dug a dwelling place and settled tenaciously forever, Amen, among us. Thank you, Jesus-God-Spirit for your incredible grace. Amen.