

# Sermons at Union Congregational Church

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February 3, 2019

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 4:16-30

## ***Jesus Came for Who?***

People of God, give listen to these words, for I speak of the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth,

Luke 4:16-30(NRSV)

*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, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

*'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 favour.'*

*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. 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 home town 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 home town. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers 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.*

The Word of God for the People of God,  
Thanks be to God.

Whoa did they get mad in a rush! The folks in Nazareth wanted to chuck Jesus off a cliff! Throwing Jesus off a cliff! You'd have to be angry at someone to want to send them off a cliff! I mean really angry. Not just annoyed. Not just mad. BUT Enraged and outraged. Absolutely ballistic. Seeing and running in the red. How did the crowd go from speaking well of Jesus in verse 22 to being filled with rage in verse 28?

The folks in Nazareth were proud of their local boy done good. Word of Jesus' activities in Capernaum and other parts of Galilee had reached home. The people in the synagogue were Jesus' neighbors, people Jesus lived with for most of his life. These were his people. Much in the way those sitting here today are Ryan's people. They want good things for him. They want to be supportive. They love him. He is the local celebrity of the day.

What is more, the crowd has just heard Jesus announce good things are coming for them. Good things coming from God. Not six weeks of winter or an early spring or some such nonsense. Good News, which would turn the world upside down. They heard what they wanted to hear. Those in the synagogue that sabbath were on the bottom and Jesus announced that was going to change.

Living under Roman domination, Galilee being administered by a non-Jewish King, they were the poor who were going to receive the good news. They were a captive people. They were the blind who would see the world more clearly. This had been God's promise to God's chosen people since the time of Moses. The promise of redemption ritually remembered by presenting of newborns in the temple. The same promise proclaimed by kings and prophets. The promise the exiles in Babylon held onto and experienced when they were allowed to return to Judah. God's promise for God's people. Jesus has declared this promise is coming to fruition today.

The problem here is that Jesus has said something, but the crowd is hearing more than Jesus actually said. They have made an erroneous jump in their logic. Jesus feels the need to provide some clarification. He needs to let the crowd know that they are mistaken.

So, Jesus reminds the crowd of two stories about a couple of prophets. And not just any prophets, Elijah and Elisha. Two of the "superhero" prophets of scripture. Elijah who stood up to King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Elijah who defeated the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Elijah who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, and the people were waiting on his return.

And Elisha, who began as Elijah's sidekick, and then Elijah's successor. Elisha who purified and restored the poisoned waters of Jericho. Elisha who miraculously provided nourishment during famines. The two prophets were heroes of the Jewish people.

But Jesus points out to the crowd, Elijah spent time with a widow and her son in Zarephath, a Phoenician town. During his time there, the widow's son died. Among the acts of Elijah was the raising from the dead the widow's son. This is the first restoration to life found in scripture, and the individual raised was not Jewish, but a Phoenician.

By citing these two examples, Jesus points out to the crowd that one of Elisha's miracles was curing Naaman of leprosy. This is the earliest miraculous healing of leprosy found in the bible. The beneficiary was not an Israelite, but Syrian. A Syrian who as a military commander had raided Israel!

Jesus points out that these two prophets could have been available by God to perform these miracles for the benefit of the people of Israel, God's chosen people. But God elected to have the prophets help people from outside Israel. People from communities, which periodically were Israel's enemies, Israel's opposition.

It wasn't that there was not a need within Israel. The three-year drought and accompanying famine, which claimed the life of the Phoenician boy, was primarily experienced by Israel; there would have been no shortage of widow's sons dying. There were plenty of lepers in the ancient world and Israel. Elisha did not need to be contacted by a Syrian General to glorify God. But God chose to express Godself through the prophets and these other people.

And Jesus reminded the crowd in that synagogue, and reminds us, that the Good News was not reserved for God's chosen people. The good news for the poor, meant all the poor. The release of the captives meant all the captives. Recovery of sight to the blind meant all the blind. Freeing of the oppressed would be for all oppressed people. In short, the year of the Lord was for the benefit of ALL PEOPLE.

Including those living on the margins and the edge, who did not follow God, like the Phoenician widow and her son.

And even those who were involved with the oppression of the people of God, like Naaman.

Living in Nazareth, a piece of the Roman empire administered by a client king of non-Jewish descent, where the average person was scraping the earth to live a subsistence existence where one's hope had to be placed in God, because every other institution and authority, including the temple, had been corrupted, you too might be a little angry when your local boy done good starts pointing out that the Year of the Lord is now, and it is for the benefit of, not just you, but the non-believers and even those oppressing you. The messiah is coming for who? Jesus is here for who?

This story serves as a reminder that Jesus, the trajectory and an embodiment of God's saving grace, is not only for the faithful, but for those who are not. Jesus came for those who get to church on Sunday morning, and for those who don't. The Holy Spirit fills our sails, and empowers the church, not just for the benefit of those in the pews, but for those who ridicule the church.

The Body of Christ, the Kingdom of God, can be healthy and it can be weak. A church is healthy when it looks beyond its four walls to the world. When it looks to the world to serve and when it looks to the world to invite in, particularly those who it serves. A church at its healthiest serves some of the most difficult people.

Consider the people you know who don't go to church. Who don't do "organized religion" or don't believe in God. Maybe they condescendingly say, they are Spiritual but not Religious. Many of us have folks like that in our lives. Maybe, you, like me, went through a period of time when you were one of those annoying people.

Now think about out of all those scoffers and unbelievers you personally know. Pick one you don't like. Can you picture this person?

Remember, that person is loved by God. They need to hear the transformational message of the Gospel.

We know exposure to the Gospel and the church can cause even the hardest of hearts to soften, the most difficult of people to become God loving people.

Consider for a moment people like Zacchaeus a despised tax collector who took advantage of people by over-assessing and over-collecting and pocketing the revenues. Once Jesus entered his life, he changed for the better.

Think about the Apostle Paul, persecuting Christians, dragging those of Jewish descent back to Jerusalem to stand trial. A moment with Jesus on the road to Damascus and he was changed.

Can you invite the person who you envisioned a few minutes ago to church? Could you personally invite them to share in hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ each Sunday morning here at Union Congregational?

So that they might hear how Jesus came for them, and their lives could be changed?

Jesus came for you, but he also came for the jerk. Jesus came for those trying to do good, but He came for corrupt officials, drug dealers, and philanderers as well... and if those folks are ever going to have a shot at moving toward living a Christ-centered life, they need to know Jesus came for them.

The message Jesus delivered, and the work Jesus accomplished was for you, but everything Jesus did was for that person too. God loves each and every one of us. God loves us so much that God sent Jesus. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Our eternal God loves the believers, and God loves the unbelievers.

God loves the just, and God loves the criminal.

God loves the righteous, and God loves the sinner.

God loves the Israelites, and God loves those who fought against them.

God loves the followers with proper understanding, and God loves the heretics.

God loves the martyrs, and God loves those who killed them.