

*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 this not 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 his 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 with a skin disease in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." 28 When 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.*

I've mentioned before that I preach from the Lectionary, which is a group of texts assigned to each Sunday of the year, I've made a few copies of the schedule for the year and left in the narthex if you are interested. Each Sunday is assigned an Old Testament text, a Psalm, a Gospel, and an Epistle or New Testament text. These texts are set on a three-year cycle and have been established for decades, in their current form.

Now, what this means is that I don't go flipping through my bible finding the passages I want to preach or having any agenda of my own. That's why I like preaching from the Lectionary, it cuts down on some biases from the preacher. That being said, I am continually amazed at how these chosen texts can be so incredibly relevant and timely, and well, perfect for what is going on in the world around us.

If we have watched the news, we've seen what can happen when a preacher proclaims a Gospel that the congregation isn't ready to hear. We've seen the struggle of balancing difficult challenges with merciful answers. In the conclusion of Luke's story, we find a very similar situation.

Jesus has initially wowed the congregation. He has read Isaiah 61 with an authority that they didn't see coming. At first, the congregation seems good with this message. They are surprised that one of their own, Joseph's son, has this kind of confidence and authority in his plans to serve God, but they don't have an issue with it...until he stretched them a bit too far. Something shifts in them that sends them from proud hometown neighbors to a violent mob intent on throwing him off a cliff. It's a pretty drastic change that leaves us scratching our heads, wondering "What just happened here?"

What I see is that the crowd is with him until he says he needs to be somewhere else. The mindset of the crowd begins to shift when the hometown boy says, "Look, I'm not moving back home to do my miracles and teach my sermons. I'm meant for the world, not just for you."

Now, the truth is, as faithful Jews, they knew this about God. From the time God promised Abraham that Israel would be "blessed to be a blessing" to others, the Jewish people knew of God's intent to save the whole world, not just them, but through them.

From the time that Elijah saved the widow in Sidon and Elisha the leper in Syria, Israel knew of God's love for others, even if those others lived behind enemy lines. This news is not new to them and not

unwelcomed to them. This isn't a story about how the Jewish people didn't want to be inclusive, it is a story about humanity's struggle with insecurity and fear. Something all of us are far too familiar with.

I think this is at the root of the crowd's anger at Jesus. They see he has something special to offer and now they hear that he will take his miracles and blessings and teachings and leave them behind. Maybe it stirred a kind of jealousy; an emptiness of fear and insecurity rumbling in their gut and leaving them hungry for security, safety, and salvation that they suddenly worry was passing them by.

Maybe this happens because we humans still cannot grasp the infinite power of God. We are still convinced that God has limits. We let our fear and insecurity convince us that God's love has limits, that God's faithfulness is finite, that God's abundance will lead to scarcity for some and so we start to think we need to claim it all for ourselves so that WE can prioritize it and disperse it in the way WE see fit...because ultimately we are afraid it won't be enough for everyone.

We do this today! We lay claim to Jesus and the Christian message in ways that allow us to hold our blessings close and let others pick up the crumbs from under the table. We aren't opposed to others being loved by God, as long as we are fully loved first. We weren't opposed to others being blessed by God, as long as those blessings funnel through us. Much like those hearing Jesus that day weren't opposed to Gentiles being part of God's kingdom, but they struggled with the idea that Jesus was going to leave them in order to go carry that mission out.

This is the power of fear and insecurity in our lives, that it can convince us that we have to prioritize God's love and provision and abundance. We begin to grab at everything we feel is a threat to our own security and well-being and hurl it off cliffs so that we can have a sense of safety and security and salvation...because ultimately, we just don't believe God has enough for everyone. Maybe that's because we know we struggle to have enough and be enough. We struggle to love enough and to be generous enough, and to trust enough. Everything within us pulls us toward self-preservation and a mentality of scarcity. But Jesus came to teach us to push against that pull...to expand our faith and know that God is big enough to love everyone, to save everyone, and to still love and save us in the process.

It is a message Jesus will remain faithful to preach, like when the young man asks him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and Jesus replies, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." Notice there is no priority listed other than put God at our core. After that, if you have God, you have enough to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself, we don't have to pick and choose. This isn't an either/or kind of situation. We can do both! We are called to do both.

If it wasn't clear enough, Jesus tells the young man a story about a Jewish man that is robbed, beaten, and left in a ditch to die...a priest and then a Levite (One who served God by assisting the priests), cross to the other side of the road in order to avoid the injured brother...they don't have enough love to give, enough generosity to offer, enough compassion to care. But a Samaritan comes by...a descendent from Israel, the Jewish faith considered them unclean and impure...they avoided them...but it is a Samaritan who takes pity and goes to help the man. Jesus himself later models this at a well in Samaria when he talks to a woman and saves her entire village.

The thing is, these are Jesus' hometown people, his neighbors, who watched him grow up, people he has loved and respected and enjoyed...but he sees first-hand how hard it is for them to keep their fear and insecurity at bay. He feels, as they grasp at his robes and chase him toward the cliff, the ease with which loving people can let a sense of divine privilege blind them to the abundance of God's love and salvation.

How far are we willing to let fear push us? How hard will we work to prevent the hope that Jesus proclaimed in calling for a year of Jubilee, where debts are forgiven and mercy abounds? How far will we go before our eyes are open to the abundance of God that promises us there is enough love and mercy for everyone?

Some of Jesus' favorite words were, "fear not." And I think it is sometimes hard for us hometown folks to hear. People try to convince us we need fear in order to feel secure, but Jesus teaches us that trust in God is all that we need, that God has enough love for the world, enough grace for all people, enough mercy, even in the most trying of situations, to save us all. Anything else goes against the mission of Christ: which is be the good news that liberates, illuminates, and redeems.