

King of Glory Lutheran Church
January 29-30, 2022
Year C: Epiphany 4: Luke 4:21-30
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Luke 4:21-30

²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³He 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.’” ²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵But 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; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There 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. ²⁹They 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. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Today we meet Jesus living on the edge. The edge of a cliff.

Now I myself am not a big fan of cliffs. They are dangerous. I always worry about getting too close to the edge, about having no where to go but down.

But I know there are some people who love the thrill of hanging over cliffs. I have a friend who happily admits that rock climbing is worth the risk involved. He loves the feeling of being on the edge of a great mountain.

Well, Jesus found his way up plenty of mountains climbing over rocks. But on this day in Nazareth, his hometown, I don’t think he had planned a day of rock climbing and adventure.

And yet there he stands. At the edge of a cliff. So how did he end up there?

Well today in our gospel reading Jesus is home for a visit. As a Jewish man he follows the commandments and observes the Sabbath. He goes to the synagogue and reads the Torah in his faith community.

Our gospel reading this week is really Part Two of Jesus' visit to his hometown. In our reading last week we heard Jesus read the Torah and sit down to teach and discuss the reading. This week Luke's gospel tells us that everyone was impressed and amazed by Jesus, Joseph's boy. For a few minutes anyway.

But as he continues to speak, Jesus becomes less popular. He quotes scripture about prophets not being accepted in their hometown.

And then he goes on to speak of prophets who helped people outside of their own community. Elijah sent to a widow in Sidon and Elisha sent to Naaman the Syrian.

And this didn't go over so well.

The reminder that God cared for people outside of their community was not well received. And the idea that God would send prophets and messengers to foreigners, was not a hit with Jesus' hometown crowd in Nazareth.

Surrounded by his neighbors, friends and family, Jesus suddenly finds himself facing an angry mob.

In speaking God's love for all people that day, Jesus said something that was hard to hear. God's love goes beyond God's chosen people. Jesus was sent to the Gentiles as well as the Israelites.

You see, the people of Nazareth thought they had an "in" with Jesus. He was one of their own. They weren't planning on sharing Jesus and at the very least they probably wanted an impressive display of Jesus' powers.

In a way, they wanted to control God's love, put boundaries on Jesus' ministry.

But Jesus won't have any of that. He reminds the people of Nazareth that the life of a prophet, one who speaks for God, is not about bringing glory to the hometown crowd.

Prophets often speak words that people don't want to hear.

That was true of prophets in the Old Testament. There were prophets who called God's people to turn around, to change, to remember the God who created all things. There were prophets who spoke out against greed, violence and injustice.

Saying these things to kings, queens, priests and neighbors did not make those prophets very popular.

And what about prophets in the New Testament like John the Baptist? Repent. Turn around. Change your ways. Being a prophet was a dangerous business for John, one that cost him his life.

What about prophets in our own time?

I have long appreciated the wisdom and activism of Desmond Tutu and Malala Yousafzai. They are two people I consider prophets of our time. Desmond Tutu was a South African Anglican bishop and theologian, known for his work as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist. Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani activist for female education. Both are winners of the Nobel Peace Prize. Both risked their lives for human rights. Both were attacked for speaking out and living out a new way for people to live and grow together.

There are countless examples of prophets rejected by their own people because of the truth they share. And yet that is what prophets do. They speak truth. They call people to God's ways of love.

And prophets do so standing at the edge of a dangerous cliff with angry mobs threatening to push them over.

It's not easy being a prophet. Jesus knew this from his own experience. But sharing God's message with words and actions was a risk Jesus was willing to take.

As we listen to Jesus today we hear that God sent prophets to heal the outcasts and care for foreigners. And we know that Jesus will do the same in his own ministry. He leaves Nazareth and goes on his way touching people who no one would touch, eating with people no one else wanted to invite over for dinner, offering forgiveness to those past all hope of love and reconciliation.

Jesus came to our world that we too might be touched by God's love. That we might understand and know that we are loved by God, regardless of nationality,

gender, class or ability. Our God crosses all borders and gathers all people together. God's love is bigger than any boundaries we want to create.

For all of us – those afraid of cliffs and those who like to live dangerously – Jesus is calling us to follow him this day.

The life of a prophet can be a dangerous business. The life of a disciple is as well. Speaking God's word is not always well received. It takes a lot of courage to speak truth and act with love.

Today we need to ask ourselves, are we willing to go out to the edge of the cliff? Are we willing to take a risk to share God's love? It might mean doing something that makes us uncomfortable or that we are afraid of. It might mean being rejected or hurt or laughed at.

Maybe you are afraid of visiting someone who is sick or dying because you don't think you have the right words. God will be with you in your words or your silence. It's worth the risk.

Maybe you can't bring yourself to pray for your worst enemy or practice forgiveness. God forgives even when we can't and asks us to pray for our enemies. It's worth the risk.

Maybe you don't think you have the courage to speak a word of peace and love in a conversation where there is only fear and hate. God gives us the courage to do the things we think we can't do. When we are rejected or laughed at we hold onto God's promise that God will never reject us.

When you find yourself called to a difficult task or feel pushed to the edge know that you are not alone on the edge of that cliff. Jesus is there with you, offering courage, strength and love.

Jesus who dared to speak God's word of love, who stood on the edge, who walked through the angry crowd and continued on his journey.

Follow Jesus. Take a risk. Share God's love when God puts the opportunity before you. It might make someone angry. But it also might bring hope or peace or joy to someone who desperately needs it.

You won't know until you take the risk. Amen.