

## THE DISTURBING MESSAGE

Our text is the Gospel Lesson. From Luke 4 we listen again to verse 28:

*All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

There is a strong tendency to think about Jesus only as a kind, tender, gentle person. Make no mistake about it, our Lord who held children on his knee, who reached out to heal the sick and suffering, who had compassion on multitudes, who bound up the brokenhearted was a gentle man.

But this gentle man, this Jesus of Nazareth, had a message that disturbed people. He disturbed the money-changers who made God's temple a den of thieves. He disturbed the proud and arrogant who honored God with their lips but not with their hearts. He disturbed the self-righteous who had the audacity to thank God that they weren't like the humble, penitent people among them. And on this day, in the synagogue of Nazareth, he disturbed the hometown crowd.

*Verse 28, All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.*

Jesus didn't return to Nazareth with the intention of stirring up hostility. He returned to his hometown to proclaim himself the Anointed One, the long-awaited Messiah, and to proclaim God's plan of salvation.

That was the subject of Pastor Kassulke's sermon last Sunday, the message Jesus preached. You will recall that Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth, read a portion of the Prophet Isaiah which referred to the Messiah, and then declared, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* (Luke 4:21 NIV). Today we will discover the impact, the disturbing results of the message Jesus preached.

Luke tells us that, at first, *"all (the people) spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips."* Now this is a preacher's dream! You preach one sentence, and the whole congregation is amazed! They were in awe. They even began to show a little hometown pride. Wow! Can it be that this child, who grew up in our midst, is the Messiah? It's too good to be true. He's going to be a blessing to our town."

But in reaction to the enthusiasm and to the amazement of his hometown folk, Jesus replied, *'Surely you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'*

In other words, Jesus understood that the initial enthusiastic response to his message from his hometown crowd, was motivated by the hope that they would benefit personally from his ministry. After all, this is where Jesus grew up. Surely he feels an allegiance to his hometown. Surely he will think of Nazareth first, and shower us with his blessings. It's as if they were saying, "Do a few miracles for us, Jesus. Show us your power."

<sup>24</sup> *"I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. Jesus came to his hometown, Nazareth, to "preach good news to the poor," the good news of the Gospel with all its power to save. His message was intended to disturb those who were counting on themselves and their "good" lives for their own salvation. His message was intended to afflict the comfortable with the law of God which says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23 NIV).*

And then his message was intended to **comfort the afflicted** with the gospel message which says, “. . . *the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin* . . .” (1 John 1:7 NIV). His message was intended to restore peace between God and mankind.

You would like to think that the folks in Nazareth would have responded to Jesus’ message and embraced it with open hearts. But that’s not the way it worked in the synagogue that day. Nor is it significantly different today.

In every age, Jesus’ message is met with doubt, skepticism and disbelief by those who think it’s too good to be true: “You mean to tell me there’s nothing I need to do, nothing I can do to contribute to my salvation? That doesn’t seem right.” And his message is rejected by those who think they don’t need what Jesus offers: “Hey, I’ve got myself a good job, I’ve got a good family and a good house and a good car and a flat screen TV, and I’ve got good health . . . I haven’t needed God so far, so why would I need him now?”

Even though Jesus taught with authority, even though the crowds at first spoke well of him there is suspicion and disbelief which presents itself in this question: “*Isn’t this Joseph’s son?*” The implication is clear. “This is the young man we saw grow up. This is the carpenter’s son. Who does he think he is? Where does he get the authority to stand up and tell us that he’s the Messiah? “*Isn’t this Joseph’s son?*” Who does he think he is?

Centuries separate us from that day in Nazareth. But how much different do you think it is today? There is a remarkable consistency to human behavior. Christ comes to many hometowns around the world in a message through which the Holy Spirit brings light to those who live in darkness. Believing the message is a matter of life or death. John 3:18, *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already.*

Who do you think you are? That’s what the people of the world ask a Christian when you speak to them about sin, how dangerous it is and how sin can work to separate a person

from God. Who do you think you are? That’s a typical response when sexual sins, an immoral lifestyle are exposed and confronted. Who do you think you are? That’s a typical response when you point out non-Christian behavior to a straying brother or sister. Who do you think you are? That’s the typical response a pastor or Christian counselor gets when one partner to a marriage is told that he or she is destroying the relationship with selfish, un-Christlike behavior. Who do you think you are? That is unfortunately, more and more, the response of Christians when Jesus’ message confronts us in a place where we’d rather not have him intrude.

Many years ago, in the deep South, there was an older woman, a church-going woman, who made “moonshine” as her hobby. She would then sell her product to supplement her meager income. This, of course, was illegal but pretty common in that part of the South. At church one Sunday, the lady was listening intently to the sermon. The pastor was preaching fervently against all the common sins, from lying, cheating and stealing to murder and adultery, and everything in between. The lady swayed in her seat, and murmured “Amen, Amen” from time to time. But when the preacher hit on the subject of making and selling moonshine, the lady sat bolt-upright and said, “Now he’s left preaching and taken to meddling.”

Who do you think you are? It’s a question we mumble under our breath when the Word of God is directed at us. Who is he to question my sporadic church attendance? I’ve got a busy life. Who is he to question my stewardship? What I put in the collection plate, that’s my business. Who are they to suggest that I need Bible study? Who are they to point out my love affair with the things of this world? Who do they think they are?

What we don't dare say out loud, but what we are really saying inwardly where no one else can hear us is: "Who does God think he is? My life is none of his business! Our age needs the "message that disturbs" just as much as any other generation, to show us how far we stray from God's holy will, and to make us ready to hear the message that heals: good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, the release of those who are oppressed.

It's not totally surprising that the people of Nazareth, trapped by doubt and skepticism of Jesus' message, would also be confused about the real purpose of Jesus mission. They didn't understand what Jesus had come to do, to redeem the world from sin. Instead they wanted a miracle. They wanted entertainment before they would believe his claim to be the Messiah. *"Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum."* Dazzle us with some supernatural act and we'll support you as our leader. We'll let you lead the rebellion against Rome. We'll follow you all the way to Jerusalem.

But that is not what Jesus came to do. Instead Jesus gave the hometown crowd two examples from the Old Testament of God showing mercy to Gentiles and not to Jews, through the prophets Elijah and Elisha. In the days of Elijah and Elisha, the Israelites rejected the Word of the Lord, so the Lord took his saving message and his miraculous signs elsewhere.

The people of Nazareth were acting like their unbelieving ancestors of long ago. So they too, would receive neither the promises of spiritual release, freedom from the oppression of sin, nor the accompanying miracles. Jesus was not going to perform any miracles and Jesus threatened to take his saving message and start preaching to the gentiles as was done by Elijah and Elisha.

*<sup>28</sup> All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. <sup>29</sup> They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.*

On the cover of today's service folder is a present day photo of the site (right outside the city of Nazareth), where, tradition says, the hometown crowd wanted to throw Jesus off the cliff. Mt. Precipice is more than a little hill. To be thrown from this point would certainly result in death. Verse <sup>30</sup> *But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*

You see, God's people, Israel then and the Christian church today, already have abundant promises from God. The Jewish people then, and we believers today, shouldn't need miracles to confirm God's Word. In fact, it's a sign of weakness and doubt to demand a miracle. Faith believes God's Word without having to see any visible miracles. But even today we confuse the mission of Jesus. We want him to be like a genie in a bottle, granting our every wish. We want the one who saved us from eternal condemnation to keep every little trial or tribulation from our life. We would like at least one miraculous answer to prayer every once in a while just to "validate" our faith.

But Jesus swept away the shallow and confused thinking about his mission. He did so by allowing himself to be placed into the hands of sinful, violent men (not here in Nazareth, his time had not yet come, but two years later in Jerusalem). He did so by suffering a painful execution to pay for the sins of the whole world. He does so now, with a message that comforts, a message that says: Whoever believes in me will live, fully and freely forgiven, and never die.

Let us pray.

Precious Savior Christ Jesus,

Oh how we need the message that disturbs to wake us up from apathy, self-righteousness, pride and a sinful love of this world. And how we then long for the message of comfort, the message that heals, the message that, through faith in you, we are released from the captivity of sin and liberated from the oppression of guilt, joyful that our sins are forgiven in full. Help us now to live as children of God, witnessing the truth of your message to a world in need. In your precious name we pray. Amen.