

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (C) – Luke 4:21-30

Imperatives of Discipleship – *Be open!*

Focus Question: *How open are we to the new ways God is working in our lives?*

word of life

“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?’” Luke 4:22 (NRSV)

Read Luke 4:21-30

This passage completes the story begun in the last session. Take time to read Luke 4:16-20. Jesus has returned to Nazareth and is at the synagogue, participating on the Sabbath day. He takes the scroll and reads from the prophet Isaiah, “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 favor.” (Luke 4:18-19 NRSV) Then he sits down. All eyes are fixed upon him. The key verse in understanding this entire passage comes next, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21 NRSV) Jesus stops talking and allows the words to penetrate the hearts and spirits of the listeners.

At first, all speak well of Jesus, impressed by his gracious words; but then the implication of his words is grasped. The simple proclamation by Jesus of fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy *today* is an outrageously bold statement and borders on arrogance. Jesus is not speaking to strangers but is in his own hometown surrounded by those who had watched him grow up in the synagogue. They know Joseph. They know Jesus’ family.

1. *How could Jesus make such a claim?*
2. *What is at the heart of the reaction of the crowd?*

Jesus does not seem to be surprised or dismayed by their reaction. He almost expects it. For centuries in the Old Testament, God sent prophets to speak God’s word to the people of Israel, only to have the prophets rejected. Sometimes that word of God comforted and consoled, but at other times it was a hard word to hear as the prophet called people to repent and turn back to God.

3. *Why might a prophet be rejected in his or her hometown?*
4. *Why might a prophet be rejected in other places?*
5. *If the prophet brings good news and a restored relationship with God, why not listen?*

Jesus seems to be aware that there is some discontent about his ministry in Capernaum. His hometown neighbors want Jesus to do likewise in *their* town. Jesus reminds those in the synagogue of familiar Old Testament prophets who extended God’s goodness to non-Jews. For example, God sent Elijah to assist a poor widow in Sidon during a time of famine (1 Kings 17:8-16) and Elisha to heal Naaman, a Syrian (II Kings 5:1-17). This does not seem to reassure anyone, but instead the people become enraged!

6. *Why do the people in the synagogue react so strongly?*
7. *What is at the heart of their rage?*

The people drive Jesus out of town and attempt to hurl him over the cliff, but Jesus is able to pass through the enraged crowd and continue on with his mission.

8. *How might Jesus have felt to be rejected by his hometown synagogue?*
9. *What would you like to say to Jesus at this point of his ministry?*

word among us

The new cranberry-colored hymnals were placed before the altar so they might be blessed at Sunday worship. The Worship Committee was excited about the new settings and hymns, anticipating a renewal of worship for their congregation. A few who sat in the back pews dreaded saying farewell to their beloved green hymnals. Actually, they were still grieving the red hymnal which preceded the green hymnal. Change is hard.

Fortunately, the new hymnal contained the two liturgy settings from the green hymnal, so there would be old friends within the new hymnal. Plus, there were plenty of the old favorite hymns included in the new hymnal –favorites from the 16th century as well as this century. Maybe, just maybe, this hymnal might have the potential of becoming a blessing after all.

1. *Why is it hard to be open to something new?*
2. *What if the new thing is guaranteed to be great?*
3. *Is there anything we can do to prepare for change?*

At first, those in the synagogue who listened to Jesus read from Isaiah and heard his reflection were amazed at his gracious way.

4. *Why might they have been so supportive of Jesus in the beginning?*
5. *At some point, the people shut down from being open. What happens in us when we shift from being open about something to being closed-minded?*

The listeners were probably not expecting Jesus to announce the fulfillment of the Isaiah passage *today!* Yet, Jesus lived that passage by bringing good news, releasing the captive, healing the blind, and freeing the oppressed. This was not an arrogant man making outrageous statements to impress and show off in front of his hometown. Jesus was proclaiming the reality of those whom he had already transformed.

Jesus is still at work *today!*

6. *How is Jesus at work extending the fulfillment of the Isaiah passage in your life?*
7. *How might Jesus extend good news, healing and freedom to others in your life?*

No doubt there are places in our life closed to God's grace and love. We are invited to trust in Christ to release us and open us. That can be a difficult process, particularly if it means breaking old habits.

God is one of surprises; be it giving sight to the blind, forgiveness to the sinner, or resurrection for the dead. God might even choose to surprise us through a new hymnal and songs which give God glory. Let us pray that changes like the new hymnal are not just for change's sake alone, but will foster and strengthen faith in Jesus Christ.

8. *Take a moment to reflect on the areas of your life which need to be opened to God's grace.*

Prayer

Source of all power, open our spirits, hearts, and minds to your grace. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 61:1-13

last word

Take a deep breath and look around you.
Be open to what you see and hear.



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