

God's Love

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For Berkeley Chinese Community Church All Church Bilingual Communion
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Luke 4:21-30

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 hometown 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 hometown. 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; 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.

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"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus is speaking...he has just read the familiar, hopeful words of 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,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And Jesus declared this scripture has been fulfilled! By their hearing it...with Jesus!
Then the gospel reading continued –

- about how everyone loved Jesus;
- about how they were all so proud that he had healed folks;

All those gathered were hoping that he would do all those great things right there in his hometown – the miracles, the healings!

But when **Jesus** continued – his words were shocking...

- *"You don't really respect me because I'm one of you;*
- *"I'm going to say things that you don't want to hear;*
- *I'm going to say things that will make you angry;*
- *You think that **you're** the ones who are the oppressed...*
- *Think again, "**You** are the oppressors!"*
- *Stop thinking of yourselves! Listen up - I'm talking about God's good news, God's love, and it's for the **whole** world...for everyone...not just you!*

Wow! Jesus said that to his hometown folks, “**You’re** the oppressors!” Where did he get such a notion? Sacred texts! - from the stories they’d all heard growing up!



Jesus recalled the story about Elijah during a severe famine - Elijah was sent only to a widow at **Zarephath in Sidon** even though there were many widows in Israel!



He also recalled the story of Elisha - that even though there were many lepers in Israel, Elisha cleansed only Naaman the **Syrian!** Zarephath in **Sidon** and **Syria?** NOT Israel!!!



Friends - These were *Israelites* Jesus was talking to! Remember? the Israelites believed THEY were God’s chosen people – that God’s blessings were only for them – **no one else!** Not Syrians, Not Sidonians, Not Syrophenicians! **No One else!**

With these stories, Jesus reminded them that God’s promises and blessings **were for everyone** – not just a small group in a certain lineage...not just the crowd that Jesus was talking to that day...Israelites - these Israelites believed **they** were the ones **being** oppressed; they were NOT the oppressors...



They did not like what they heard! They not only didn’t like it – they got angry – they were so angry they tried to throw Jesus off a cliff!



BUT wait – Jesus **didn't** get thrown off the cliff...Jesus passed through them...he walked away! How did THAT happen? This is an angry crowd...isn't an angry crowd a bunch of people with a mob mentality?



I took social psychology – I remember learning that when people are part of a group experiencing emotional excitement, they lose themselves and forget their usual inhibitions! But it says right there in Luke – Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way. What happened? We have no details! This is all we know:

- the angry crowd is driving Jesus out of town



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- they are pushing him to the edge of the cliff described as a “Brow of a hill”
- AND Jesus walks away



Where are the details? OK – this is Jesus – Jesus can perform miracles –



Did he zap calm into the angry crowd? Did the peace-filled, loving presence of Jesus



calm that crowd even though it was his own words that got them angry? Was that the miracle?

Was the distance between the synagogue and the cliff enough to allow time for conversation and debate?

Were there some rational folks in the crowd?



Were there voices that said, *“Wait! What are we doing? Are we going to kill this teacher because we don’t like what he said? Are we going to kill this healer because he’s not going to do his magic for us?”* I wonder if *that* happened...

Or, Maybe it was just God’s love...



AND I wonder about today? I wonder if Jesus’ words would provoke **us** to anger? Are we oppressors? Even unintentionally? Are we virtual oppressors because we participate in oppressive systems?



Would **we** be provoked to anger? And if so, anger at whom? And about what?



How **do** we feel when God's love keeps pulling us toward God's bigger picture...toward God's love for all including those who are not like us, including those who we believe are the "enemy"?

And just who **are** those *we think* are excluded from God's blessings, from God's Love? And what will we do about it?



Next week will be BCCC's annual meeting – we'll vote about priorities and leaders, about our budget, about how to be God's church...

- It's a good time to look inward to discover eternal truths implanted there by God eons ago.
- It's a good time to remember our job is to love God and to love everyone and live it through our missions and ministries.

All this reminds me of a story...a story you may know...but listen again...this time in the context of sharing & shining God's love.



Once upon a time there was an abbot – the head of a monastery. He was very good friends with the rabbi of a local synagogue.



This was Europe during difficult times....



The abbot's community was dwindling and the faith life of his monks was shallow and lifeless. He went to his friend and wept. His friend, the rabbi, comforted him and told him: "There is something you need to know, my brother. We have long known in the Jewish community that the Messiah is one of you."

"What?" exclaimed the abbot, "the Messiah is one of us? How can that be?"



But the rabbi insisted and the abbot went back to his monastery wondering and praying, comforted and excited.

Back in the monastery, he would pass by a monk and wonder if he was the one. Sitting in chapel, praying, he would hear a voice and wonder if *he* was the one. He began to treat all of his brothers with respect, with kindness and awe, with reverence. Everyone noticed.

One of the brothers asked him what had happened to him. He told him what the rabbi had said. Soon the other monk was looking at his brothers differently and also wondering "Is *he* the Messiah?" The word spread through the monastery quickly: the Messiah is one of us! Soon the whole monastery was full of life, worship, kindness, and grace.



Prayer life was rich and passionate & devoted; services were alive and vibrant. Many villagers came to the services; many wished to join the community. And when they took their vows, the new members of the community were told the mystery: the Messiah is one of us.

The monastery grew and expanded, and all of the monks grew in wisdom, age, and grace. And they say – even now, if you stumble across this place, where there is life and hope and kindness and graciousness, the secret is the same: The Messiah is one of us.



Friends, that's the secret for us, too – "the Messiah is one of us!"

Take a moment and turn to your neighbor and whisper – "The Messiah is one of us"

May we remember this as we live into our calling...remember this secret to being God's Love of and for all: The Messiah is one of us. May it be so...Amen.