

This is one of those passages that leaves us scratching our heads and asking, “What just happened?” In the beginning, the people were amazed at Jesus’s gracious words, and then as the sermon goes on, they turn on him. They not only run him out of town – his own hometown – but to the edge of a cliff to push him off. How did it escalate to this degree – from love to hate, so quickly, to their hometown boy?

Let’s look at the scripture again and peel back the layers. This is classic Luke. This year we will be looking at the gospel story from Luke’s perspective. Luke is a great storyteller who likes a lot of details. Last year, we studied Mark, and if you remember, Mark is more of the “headlines guy” that reports what happened with minimal details.

If we think about this theologically, Mark focuses on God being with us in the big picture, and Luke focuses on God being with us in the minutia. That’s why we have many books of the Bible. God is with us in all ways – big picture and in the small details in our lives. So, Luke gives us a lot to grab on to in this scripture, so I pray that God will speak to you this morning through one of these details.

The placement of this scripture in Luke is right after Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness. He returns to Galilee and begins his ministry. He goes to many synagogues to teach in the region, and word spreads quickly about how awesome he is. He then goes home to Nazareth, the city where he grew up, to teach in the synagogue there. He stands up to read and a scroll of Isaiah is given to him. He reads Isaiah’s prophecy about himself and announces that this prophecy was just fulfilled in that moment,

that he is the one that God sent to proclaim the good news to the poor, the prisoner, the sick, and the oppressed.

This prophesy was not “business as usual,” like we know the good news today. The message Jesus taught that day was contrary to what they had been taught. Jesus focuses on God’s love, not God’s vengeance. If we compare the actual prophesy in Isaiah to what was reported in Luke, Jesus leaves out the part about God’s vengeance and focuses only on God’s love. People like to say you can’t cherry pick the Bible, but Jesus does this very thing. His message is saying they – and we -- are to reach beyond the inclusive walls to those on the other side. We are to love and share God’s love with those who aren’t in “the church club.” Jesus’ message was messing with the status quo. This was scandalous.

The people’s response is very interesting. They were amazed as he spoke, and then they said, “This is Joseph’s son, isn’t it?” (v.22) We don’t really know what was meant by that question, since the verse before it said they were amazed. Was it, “Wow, this is Joseph’s son, isn’t it? Who is so filled with the Spirit and speaking so graciously,” used in a tone that would indicate pride and favor. Or, was it, “Whoa, wait, this is Joseph’s son? He’s one of us, why is he teaching something different than we’ve taught him his whole life?” Or, even, “This is Joseph’s son? How could one who was born into such humble means speak with authority among the people in the synagogue? Who does he think he is?” We don’t really know because we just have the words in print. We don’t hear the tone that was used.

We do have Jesus' response, which seems to be a tongue-lashing out of left field. Jesus anticipates or foretells what their responses will be to him, so he calls them out on it right then and there. He addresses three rather disconnected sayings, and this response is what took the people from amazement to anger.

In Jesus' response, he addresses the potential thoughts that are steeped in defensiveness, jealousy, and rejection. He goes a step further to point out that God has always sent people across boundaries and uses extreme examples of Elijah and Elisha who helped and healed Gentiles. The breaking point was mentioning that "Naaman the Syrian" was cleansed (v.27). He was a leader in the Syrian army and was a tangible threat to the Israelites. That was just too far...How can God call us to build bridges with those who threaten us?

That is at the heart of the gospel message. That is the whole point of doing something different than we've always done. Jesus' ministry was to do something different – to shake up the status quo – to build a new kingdom and earth rooted in love. God calls us to build something – that is just as earth-shattering, just as scandalous as Jesus' message.

God doesn't call us to keep "business as usual," to be complacent or self-serving. God calls us to shake things up. God calls us to new challenges, especially if that means standing up for the poor, the prisoner, the sick, and the oppressed. Yes, we will face challenges, but that's the whole point. In those challenges, we rely on God's help and God is glorified.

God calls us to challenges. We won't always win people's favor. They can

easily turn on us if we say something they don't want to hear or suggest doing something they don't want to do. People may even want to run us out of town or push us off a cliff because they don't like what we are trying to build. It's not what they've always done. Their responses may be steeped in defensiveness, jealousy, and rejection because they feel threatened. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry – and throughout, he is rejected – by his own people.

Last month, I presided the burial service for my father. We had a memorial service right after his passing in August that his pastor conducted, and my stepmother asked if I would do the burial service. We gathered at the cemetery and when it was close to the start time, my brother looked around and asked, "Is the pastor here?" We gave him a pretty good ribbing about that, and he wasn't dismissing my call as a pastor. He just forgot I was doing it, he says. But sometimes our own people only see us as the person they used to know. They have long memories of our past, and it's hard for them to see us in our new call as a different person.

But, don't let their challenging behavior sway you from your call. Keep focused on what you are called to build, and keep centered in the love of Christ.