

February 19, 2017 “Two Questions” Luke 5:14-30

Last week we saw several things in this portion of Luke chapter 4. I shared with you that verses 14 and 15 give us a summary of the first year of Jesus public ministry. It was spent in the Galilee area. And it was a good news story. Jesus was welcomed everywhere he went. The crowds grew. It was the presence and the power of God that people discerned in HIS ministry. HE is suddenly popular. HE is a rising star.

And in the Galilee region, as HIS second year of ministry begins, HE goes to HIS home town synagogue in Nazareth. HE reads from Isaiah 62, a portion that the Jewish scholars have always insisted is a prophecy concerning the Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting with a sense of expectation. And when Jesus had finished reading HE broke the news that HE is the one of whom that portion speaks. The reviews as Luke tells us were mixed in a sense. Across the board, those who were present spoke well of HIM. They were amazed at the grace in HIS words. Understand what that compliment means...they perceived God's presence in HIS way and HIS words. Some reserved judgment overall because HE is a local boy. Just a carpenter. The son of Joseph.

And then the whole thing went south. The worm turned. These mixed reviews turn to, well, virtually a riot. They become furious. People are on their feet. They are shouting in anger. They are shaking their fists. They push forward, trying to grab Jesus. He is being handled roughly. They drag HIM out of the sanctuary, and it is not just speculation that some blows are landed. Some people are trying to get in a kick. They are so upset they want to do damage. You have never seen anything like it in all your years of attending a church service. A riot has broken out!

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Nazareth is typical of communities in Israel. They are built on hilltops. That is a strategic choice. There has to be a source of water, there has to be a source of food, and you have to be able to see enemies coming. Big cities spill into the valleys. But all of the historic communities are built on high ground. And at one end of Nazareth there is a cliff. I did not measure it. And no one told us its actual height. I would say it is comparable to the Eagle's Nest across from Tim Horton's in Bancroft. There is a cliff. You would not get bruised if you were thrown over it. Bones would break. I would be surprised if anyone would survive the fall. They drag Jesus to that cliff. They intend to kill HIM. Plain and simple, they intend to kill HIM.

So impressed was Luke with this event, he tells us everything he could learn about it. This is the first time that Jesus is clearly rejected. In fact the translators of the Bible gave this portion that title. Jesus is Rejected in Nazareth. If there had been a newspaper in Nazareth that would have been the headline. If television news had existed that would have been the lead story on the channel in Nazareth. Notice this: if Luke is writing to publicize the Christian cause, if he is writing to inspire confidence in Jesus ministry, if this document is about good publicity, this is one of the stories you and I would leave out. Luke does not. Why?

First of all he is writing to tell us Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the Saviour of the world. He is primarily telling us the story of the crucifixion and the resurrection. And Nazareth represents the first instance of opposition to Jesus ministry and HIS message. Luke tells us little about year one of Jesus ministry, because in year one there is no indication of where this ministry is going to terminate. The crucifixion is not about the failure of Jesus ministry, it is about

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the succeeding of God's plan to save us from our sins. It is not about a tragedy, it is about the grace of God!

As an historian, Luke has spotted that the ministry of Jesus began at HIS baptism in the river Jordan at the hands of John the Baptist. And he has also spotted that the journey to Calvary really began on the occasion, near the beginning of the second year of Jesus ministry in Galilee, when he preached in His home town synagogue in Nazareth. The crowd was so distraught, they wanted to kill Jesus. They intended to kill Jesus. They had the opportunity. They had the means. They had HIM where they wanted HIM. And something very mysterious happened. Suddenly Jesus is loose. They could not hold HIM. HE stands. He does not run. HE does not fight. He does not have a weapon. There is no rescuing army that is visible. HE walks through the crowd. Right through the crowd. And HE goes on HIS way. To use the words of a gospel song...maybe this is the moment when HE called on ten thousand angels...because it was not the time for Jesus to die.

There are two questions this passage provokes. The first is what happened at Nazareth? Luke tells us. Jesus life hung by a thread. I've seen the cliff from the bottom up. And for mysterious reasons Jesus was able to walk away. And we know this. Jesus never went back to Nazareth. The Bible says, HE went on HIS way. The KJV says the same thing. They had HIM at the edge of the precipice. "And HE, passing through the midst of them, went on HIS way." That is what happened.

The second question is why? Why did the crowd at worship that morning, respond positively to Jesus one minute and want HIS blood the next? It is very basic! And it is about you! You

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and me! From what Luke says they responded at least with interest to Jesus' claim that HE is the one Isaiah 62 describes. There were positive responses at least initially, to that message. I am quoting the KJV to make the point it is utterly clear what Jesus said. "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." And their initial response is worth noting. "And all bare HIM witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of HIS mouth."

What upset them in Nazareth was what Jesus went on to say, and specifically HIS words about Elijah and Elisha, two distinct and highly revered prophets whose stories are told, and whose teaching is shared in the Old Testament. In 1 Kings 17 we find the story of a great drought and a time of famine. And as Jesus said that Sabbath in Nazareth, Elijah was sent to a widow in Zarephath. And miracles of salvation occurred. She fed Elijah and her supplies of food multiplied during the drought and she and her son were spared when she expected they would starve. Jesus also referred to Elisha's being sent by God to Naaman the Syrian. Naaman was a leper. And Naaman was healed under the ministry of Elisha. But here is the nucleus of what Jesus said. In both cases God sent the prophets in question not to Jews who were in just as great a need, but to Gentiles. The widow was a Gentile. She was not a Jew. Naaman was a Syrian, a Gentile, not a Jew.

Jesus reminded the congregation of these stories in Scripture, 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 5, and at hearing ;they became furious, they rioted, they tried to throw Jesus off the cliff and simply were not allowed to do it. HE proclaimed that HE is the Messiah. They at least considered that respectfully. HE said Gentiles would be saved by HIM as the Messiah and they went ballistic. It is about you. You and me. What they wanted to kill Jesus for was HIS claim that

God could not only love non Jews, but send HIS Messiah, HIS Son to save Gentiles from their sins.

In other words, this riot in Nazareth, and the beginning of Jewish opposition to Jesus ministry was about the idea that God loves all of HIS children, always has, always will. And through Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, God would redeem any and all who came to faith.

Two things have to be said. God loves the Jewish people. They are as they have been rightly called, the apple of HIS eye. But God also loves you. You and me. In fact HE has asked less of you and me than HE has asked of HIS chosen people. HE has made the same first in importance demand of them and of us. HE wants us to exclusively recognize HIM as the One God, and Lord of all. And there are still moments when people who appear to have great faith find that difficult to do. From very early in the ministry of Jesus, Luke tells us HE recognized that HE was here on earth to save people...potentially, all people, any and all who would come to HIM. Any and all who would recognize Him and respond to HIM. Any and all who would follow Him.

The Nazareth story is amazing. It is amazing what happened there. It is amazing why what happened there, happened there. In Nazareth, and in HIS hometown synagogue, Jesus already had HIS eye on you, was concerned about you, loved you, and had plans for you, as a child of God and as a member of HIS kingdom.

Let us pray;

O God you are Father, to us all. You give us life and you pour out your blessings upon us as we seek to make the journey of

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life and especially the journey that leads to life eternal. Lord Jesus, in YOU we meet our Father who is God, and we see Your compassion for us, and your desire to redeem people regardless of race, or class, or gender. Holy Spirit, you touch us and we taste a freedom the world can not offer or give. You pour light into our darkness. You open our eyes and our minds that we might see and understand. Receive our praise. Receive our worship. Make our ability to serve others, a sacred service, that glorifies YOUR holy name. Amen