

Over the Edge

Shepherd's Grace Church

February 3, 2013

Luke 4:21-30

²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³He 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.'" ²⁴And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. ²⁵But 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; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They 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. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way. (Read Also Jeremiah 1: 4-10)

The Epistle lesson, which was not read in church this morning is one that is so famous it almost does not need to be read. In this generation of Bible illiteracy, this one passage stands large as one that almost everyone has heard. It is the passage from 1Corinthians 13, the "Love Passage" that is read at many weddings and has taken on an almost extrabiblical understanding. We read the passage as if it is a definition of love. Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious, or jealous, or boastful or rude. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails! When we hear these words outside the context of the rest of Paul's letter, we understand them only as an enigma, an unrealistic, but idealistic effort to portray that which we would all like to have. Love, when portrayed this way becomes a "Let's all hold hands and get along" ideal that can and should always stand above the petty bickering and ugly realities of everyday life.

We hold up this passage as what marriage should be like, and even as we speak it, we know it is not what marriage ever is! Marriage is instead, a microcosm of the rest of our world. Inside marriage, there is the hard reality that we come to recognize very quickly. Compromise and concession are sometimes necessary! We do not all see the world the same way! We do not always have the same opinions. We do not all always like exactly the same things! Once we get past the rose colored glasses, we recognize that marriage is hard work! In that moment of recognition, there is a blinding light that comes to us. It is a burning beacon of reality that suddenly strikes a fear in our hearts! In that moment of fear, we are caused to re-examine what we want, what we expect, what we need in our lives!

That moment occurred for me just a few weeks after Rochelle and I were married! It's not as if the honeymoon was over, but...well, it was a clear and stark reality check. During the time we were dating, I had become a frequent visitor for dinner. Rochelle would call me some time during the day and ask what I wanted and we would discuss it. When I would arrive early in the evening, the smells of the dish we had decided on wafted through the house tantalizing my taste buds and increasing my appetite. That part of our conversation continued after we were married and then one day it dawned on me that as we sat down at the table, it had been awhile since I was asked what I wanted for dinner. Instead of my choice for a meal, I was getting her choice.

Now, what she was fixing was great! I want to quickly add that comment, Chelle is a wonderful cook, but she likes white cream sauces and gravies while I tend to like more red sauces that can be easily made spicy. I found myself missing the more familiar tastes I had come to enjoy over the past several months. Days went by...weeks went by...months went by and still no red sauce food for my spice starved pallet. I kept thinking of the words of the scripture not read today. Love is not envious or arrogant or boastful or rude. The words were calling me to get along...to eat what was before me and be thankful for it, and I was thankful. I kept telling myself that the food was delicious, and it was! It just wasn't what I wanted.

One day, I went back and re-read 1Corinthians starting at chapter 11. Suddenly my eyes were opened to a much clearer picture of what Paul is trying to say to us. In chapter 11, the apostle provides for us his direction at preparing the Lord's supper. Beginning at verse 17, Paul invites us to remember that we are not alone as we eat the meal prepared for us. See, the people of 1Corinthians were not a people gathering at a wedding to hear some wonderful words that would be construed as polite but petty. They were a people angry at one another because they weren't getting what they wanted. This people came to eat a meal and they thought only of themselves.

The rich pushed their way to the front of the line so they could be served first as they were accustomed. They took all they wanted and left little for the rest. This was the way of the world! This was the way it was done! Those who were toward the end of the line often left the Lord's Supper empty handed, unsatisfied, Paul is not issuing the words of chapter 13 as some kind of feel good frivolity. Paul is issuing the words as a warning. Those who are rich, those who have plenty, those who are already cared for need to wait, to watch, to wonder at what they can do to accommodate those who have less!

It is at this point where I believe this famous passage meets our Gospel lesson for today. As we begin our focus I want to note that Rochelle is not in church this morning. She is at home, sick. I want to be clear. The story I told about the early part of our marriage, I would have told whether she was in church or not! You may laugh at this, or wonder if it is even true, but I remind you, she can also come on-line and read this sermon! She will know! The reason I want to make this clear is that I believe it has direct bearing on our the message God wants me to share with you today. God wants us to recognize that

Jesus is speaking to a very familiar audience. Jesus is speaking to those who have known him for awhile, who know his activities as a youth, who have watched him as he grew up into a young man! It is to this audience that Jesus stands to speak. Just as I share a story about the early struggles of my marriage, in the presence of the one who knows all the details of those struggles, Jesus shared his story with those who also know about the details of his growing up.

The first word Jesus speaks to these people who know him is "Today." Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing! Today, In this moment, NOW! Right now, Jesus puts aside all they know about him and remind them of all he knows about them! You see, knowledge is a two way street. Not only do the people know about Jesus as a youth, but he knows about all their failures, all their foibles, all their fears! In this context, Jesus speaks, "Today." Not yesterday when you were unaware, and not tomorrow when you can still put it off, but today, you are called he says! Today you are commanded to hear the words! Today you are recognized for who you are!

In the verses just before the ones we read today, Jesus the hometown boy returns to his hometown. We must remember from where he returns. He has been baptized in the Jordan, He has had the power of the Holy Spirit descend upon him and remain with Him. He has been spoken to by God! God has said to him, "You are my son, my beloved. With you, I am well pleased!" In that moment, God put His words in Jesus' mouth just as God put the words in the mouth of Jeremiah in the early part of Jeremiah's ministry. Remember what God said? I will give you the words to speak and you will speak them to power, to kings and to nations and they will listen because my words carry the authority of God! People will recognize this authority and will bow down to it! They will obey my commands!

This is the same message God gives to Jesus at His baptism. Jesus is then driven out into the wilderness by the power of God's Holy Spirit and is tempted. He is delivered from evil and is led not into temptation and He overcomes the adversary! Now, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returns to Nazareth. Here, he does what he has always done...he enters the synagogue and teaches there. He opens the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, finds the passage in chapter 62 (there were no chapter or verse markings so the finding would not have been automatic, he would have had to look) and he begins to read, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me."

These words would have been particularly noteworthy to the congregation gathered at synagogue that Saturday. The word anointed in Greek is christed (Christos) Jesus would have been claiming a special blessing given by God. (As a separate note, we all know our by now we are all putting together the fact that Christ is not Jesus' last name. Christ is His authority. He has been christed, anointed, sent by God as a messenger of Good News!) More likely, the word Jesus would have spoken is the word messiahed. This is the Hebrew word for anointed. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has sent me as messiah to bring the good news.

The people at this point would have been disarmed. They would have thought Jesus was reading from the prophet and that there was some message for them in this passage. Jesus would have gone on to share the good news offered by Isaiah. This is the year of jubilee! It is the year of good news! I have come to restore sight to the blind, to make the deaf to hear, the lame to walk and yes, even raise the dead to life!. This would have been the conclusion of the reading and Jesus would have sat down after he rolled up the scroll and returned to its proper place of reverence!

The passage just before our reading today ends with all the people looking at him. They are waiting...expecting...anticipating a word from him! They have heard of all he did in Capernaum and they are eager to hear him speak. They are all amazed at the words that have come from his mouth and they all speak highly of him, remembering him as one of their own, a local boy made good! They wait...they watch...they wonder what is coming next. Then Jesus speaks...

“Today” he says! Right now, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing! They begin to feel a dis-ease in their midst! They begin to feel a little uncomfortable. At this moment, right now, we should be feeling this same discomfort. God is getting ready to reveal something to us that we have known but have not wanted to admit. **RIGHT NOW!** God wants us to hear who Jesus is! This is the season of Epiphany. This is the time in our church calendar that God makes known the presence of the Christ, the Messiah, and right now in the hearing of the scripture, God makes Him known to the people who will hear! He speaks to us saying, I have anointed (Christed, Messiahed) him and filled him with the power of my Holy Spirit. Next week in the “Transfiguration” God will say to us, “Listen to Him!” Right now, God simply makes him known!

That knowledge is disconcerting in itself. It is sometimes difficult to hear that God has sent someone to give a message. That was the difficulty Jeremiah had. He was only a boy, he was too insignificant for God to use. God surely wouldn’t speak through him. That is likely what the people of Nazareth thought of Jesus. He is Joseph’s son. He is a lowly carpenter. God surely wouldn’t be using him!

God surely wouldn’t be using someone who has the same kinds of struggles in his marriage, in his life, in his finances that we have. God could never use that kind of person to bring a message to us. The people then, the people now have a difficult time believing that God uses others to speak His word! That is a problem, but that is not the only source of their discomfort. If this is the anointed messenger of God, then the rest of the scripture must be message God wants us to hear!

This is the greater reality for them! “The good news is for us!” they realize. This is to be our year of jubilee. We are the poor, the lame, the blind, the deaf...yes, we are the dead! OMG! Jesus is speaking to us, he is proclaiming a message to us, and he is saying, “Today!” We can no longer escape it, avoid it, ignore it. God has restored our hearing, our sight, our physical abilities to know and understand that we have not been all He wants us to be!

The people of 1 Corinthians 11 would have recognized that same fact in the message Paul sent them. The meal, the nourishment, the fellowship they sought was not only for their benefit, but for the benefit of all. The wealthy, the powerful, the firstborn had been abusing their privilege by taking more than they were entitled to and failing to share with those who have less! They now had a choice. They could continue on in their knowledge, ignoring God's gift to them in Jesus, or they could turn from their misdirection and acknowledge God's more excellent gift.

Paul reminds them that their diversity is their greatest strength! In chapter 12, he says that some have the gift to teach, to preach, to speak in tongues, to be served. All are different but all are necessary to the Body of Christ, the church. One cannot exist without the other! One cannot function without the other! One can not only have red sauce all the time because there are others who have wants and desires also and all have a place in the Kingdom of God!

Today we are confronted by this same reality! Today, Jesus is made known to us! Today, in this moment, in this message, in this reality Jesus comes to us and speaks to us! Today we must decide if we will hear the message, if we will accept the diversity of all that God has given us. Today, NOW!

Our world today is confronted by an ever growing edge defined by only two choices. We are consistently confronted by black or white. We are either liberal or conservative. We cannot agree with one group of people on one issue and another group of people on another. We are labeled and we are categorized by others as either friend or foe! If we are foe, we are always foe and once we are foe, we can never be friend! There is no good news in this reality and I stand before you today to say that God has a different reality!

We can recognize that we all have different gifts, different perspectives, different skills that may offer different solutions to the problems we face. We are all one body. God does not desire us to exist as individuals, but has created us to be in relationship! In relationship, God invites us to work together to solve the problems of our day. No one person has all the right answers. No one person has the right to say this is what we are going to eat for dinner each night! No one person has the authority to wield power and oppression over others. Our responsibility is to recognize that "Today" in our hearing the scripture has been fulfilled!

We are no longer blind to God's presence. We can see him in others, in the love they have for us and for our world. We are no longer deaf to God's presence. We can hear it in the cries of those who need us...those who are hungry, cold, sick, oppressed, depressed and in need of the precious gifts God has given us. We are no longer lame, unable to walk in God's presence. We have the path forged by Jesus to guide us and we can follow it together. We are no longer dead! We have been raised to new life in Jesus Christ. We are the ones to whom God speaks today, in this moment right now and the choice is ours.

Will we be the Body of Christ? Will we be the Church? Will we use our gifts of diversity together to bring about the Kingdom or will we respond as the ancient people of Nazareth responded? God has made his presence known to others in our world. He has made his presence known to people who do not speak our language or live according to our customs or traditions. Just as God made His presence known to the widow and Zorababbel and to Naaman the Syrian, God makes his presence known to people who are gay, to people who are Muslim, to people who are Mexican. But God makes His presence known to us in a way that is absolutely essential to the coming of His Kingdom. God makes his presence known to us in Jesus Christ! In Christ and in Christ alone can be the salvation of the world and God calls us together to make Christ known to others so their purpose in the Kingdom can be accomplished to God's glory! Without Christ we cannot, we will not succeed.

The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus! They tried to drive Him out of their lives! They tried to push Him *Over the Edge*. We have that same choice. We can drive Christ from our midst and He will simply go along His way to another group who will hear His message, or we can allow Him to pull us back from the edge...to allow Him to open our hearts to the great gifts of diversity that exist among us and the possibility of new realities that exist because of our differences. Jesus speaks to us today! "Today!" Right now we are called to decide!

Today, six plus years after my marriage to Rochelle, I am able to speak to her about what I want for dinner. I don't always get what I want. Sometimes I get white sauce and gravy. Sometimes however she now says, I thought you might want something with red sauce so I can make both. We have learned to recognize our differences. We have learned to work together more effectively. We have learned that no one person has a "lock" on the truth, but that through our differences we can experience a new reality. For me (and you will have to ask Rochelle about for her) this reality is more complete and promising than anything I could have ever imagined.

God invites you to that reality today. He invites me. He invites all of us! Don't allow yourself to be pushed over the edge by your selfish desires, but let Jesus pull you back from the edge today. Listen, for "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!" Amen!

Next Week: Scripture: Luke 9: 28-43 Message: *In The Clouds*. This is the last Sunday of Epiphany, also called the Transfiguration. On this Sunday we have the chance to see Jesus with the disciples for who and what He is. Will you meet Him face to face, or will your vision be blurred by your faith? Have courage! Jesus is calling! Come and worship! Come and See!

