

3RD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JANUARY 13, 2013

HE'S NOT JOSEPH'S SON

Pastor Jim Dunn

(With much indebtedness to Jeffrey Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary Series*, Matthew 1:1-11:1, pp235-242, Francis Rossow, *Gospel Handles*, section on Luke 4:16-30, and William Arndt's *Commentary on Luke*, commentary on Luke 4:16-30)

Luke 4:16-30

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." **22** And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" **23** And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." **24** And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. **25** But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, **26** and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. **27** And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." **28** When they heard these things, all in the

synagogue were filled with wrath. **29** And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. **30** But passing through their midst, he went away.

Doctors are telling us that when you receive a garbled message, you should not ignore it.

Not long ago a healthy woman who was 11 weeks pregnant was texting her husband on her cell phone. She had made a routine visit to her obstetrician's office and she wanted to let her husband know the baby's due date. However, the text messages he received from her were garbled. He texted her: "So what's the deal?" She texted back: "Every where thinging days nighing. Some is where!" He texted her: "What does that mean? You're not making any sense. July 24 is the due date, right?" She texted back: "J 30." He texted her: "Oh, ok, I'm worried about your confusing answers." She texted back: "But I think..." "Think what?" he texted her. "What I think will be fine," she texted. He immediately insisted that she go to the emergency room.

Good thing he did. Emergency room doctors at a Boston-area hospital examined the woman and noted "dysphasia," a language problem caused by brain damage. After taking a brain MRI and conducting other tests, the researchers determined the woman had suffered a stroke. They gave her medication to thin her blood and prevent another clot and she was fine. The baby was fine. Good thing that for once a husband really listened to His wife.

Jesus really needs us to listen to this, His first sermon. Here is a message He would repeat on at least two other occasions, including the Sermon on the Mount. Here is His central message, His statement of purpose, His mission statement. So, we must listen and understand.

But the thing is, this central message of Jesus comes across garbled.

The first hearers, the congregation in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, did not get it.

Typically after the sermon the congregation would ask the preacher questions or make objections. It was customary to follow the sermon with a discussion on spiritual things, on matters of faith. But Jesus' hometown congregation could only comment to one another about how well Jesus spoke and marvel at Joseph's son. "Look how far He has come! This son of the congregation has become a success." Yet, Jesus wasn't claiming to be a success. He was claiming to be the Messiah. That His work was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. They certainly claimed Jesus as their own with pride, but since Jesus was a local boy, Joseph's son, He couldn't be that important. If He was the Messiah, He was going to have to prove that by doing in Nazareth the same miracles He had performed in Capernaum. Besides, He had not yet said anything to flatter their pride as the people of Israel for whom Messiah would come. Jesus had left out of His reading of Isaiah 61:2 the sentence that would have appealed to their national pride and Messianic hopes: "to proclaim the day of vengeance for our God." They claimed Him as their own, they required of Him actions, not just words, and they interpreted His words in the light of national pride. And as a result they did not get what He was saying. They rejected Him.

Those are the same reasons Jesus' first sermon may come across garbled for us. Jesus preaches that He has come to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Words like "poor," "captive," and "oppressed" are loaded words given today's political climate. So, what Jesus is saying here can easily be misinterpreted. It's that same climate that causes various groups to place claims on Jesus as if He were their Son. This group knows what Jesus wants. That group knows what He wants. They all claim to speak for Jesus, but they can't agree on what He wants. While some Christians have enough of their own problems, and just want to know what Jesus is going to do about them. Enough talk. Enough words. Enough preaching. What's Jesus gonna do in my life?

These are the things that muddy Jesus' words: the extremely partisan political climate of our day, the claims and counterclaims of who Jesus belongs to, and our impatience that Jesus do something to relieve our burdens. Such that His message does not come through clearly that "God is not the exclusive property of any Christian denomination, ethnic group, class of people, political party, or nation." (Arndt, *Commentary on Luke*)

“God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, for everybody, even for foreigners like Naaman the leper and general of the Syrian army. God sent His Son, Jesus, even for pagan outcasts like the widow of Zarephath,” (Gibbs) who was not of the house of Israel much less Nazareth, but she lived in what is today Lebanon. God sent His Son Jesus for everybody. God sent His Son for the poor in spirit. The poor to whom Jesus preaches good news are “the spiritually poor, those who are without the resources needed in the spiritual realm, those who are desperate, those who are broken, those who cannot spiritually make it on their own. And that is everybody. All are poor...in spirit, all are oppressed...by the devil, all are captives...to original sin, their hearts crushed from living in a fallen creation,” (Gibbs) constantly at risk of dishonoring Jesus, as Nazareth did, because of not getting His message. Of just not getting it.

That includes me and you. The good news He proclaims to the poor is for you. The liberty He proclaims to the captives is for you. The setting at liberty that Jesus does for the oppressed is for you. Made possible because no prophet is acceptable in His hometown. Jesus was no exception. Now I speak not of Nazareth but of “heaven, Jesus’ hometown and home country. As much as Jesus was of Nazareth, Jesus was not Joseph’s son.

Before Nazareth Jesus had a different hometown, a heavenly one. In that terrible day on the cross when God’s Son was literally made sin for us, He discovered that He was a prophet not acceptable in the heavenly country He came from. In the eyes of His real Father, Jesus on the cross was smitten of God and afflicted. God deserted Him, damned Him, in our place to release us from our sins. So that now we look forward to being accepted in the heavenly country to which we go after death.” (Rossow) Jesus not being accepted by His hometown of heaven is what helps us understand more clearly His first and central message: for the sake of His Son, God accepts everyone. He has good news for everybody. “It is not good news to be economically poor.

But what is good news are the rich blessings of forgiveness, Baptism into Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit to believe and obey, the spiritual nourishment of the Lord’s Supper, and the fellowship of the redeemed.” (Gibbs) Blessings of which we have plenty to share with the economically poor who are likely to be aware of their spiritual

poverty. And “it is not bad news to have wealth. But having wealth does not automatically mean that one has everything. Jesus spoke often of the folly of those who glory in their wealth and whose hearts are cold toward their needy neighbors,” (Gibbs) so we have some rich blessings that they need. Jesus not being accepted by His hometown of heaven for us helps us recognize “the dangers of living in a wealthy, “consumeristic”, and greedy society such as North America. To confess that there are prevalent ways of thinking in our society regarding poverty and wealth, class and ethnicity that can hide Christ's kingdom goal from our eyes” (Gibbs) and garble His message.

The One who is not Joseph's son but God's Son given for us all enables us to confess how poor of spirit we are, but how richly blessed we are in Christ.

Amen