

"Upset With The Sermon"
Rev. Dr. Scott Field
Luke 4: 21-30
February 3, 2019
9:15 AM Service

Luke 4:21-30 New Living Translation (NLT)

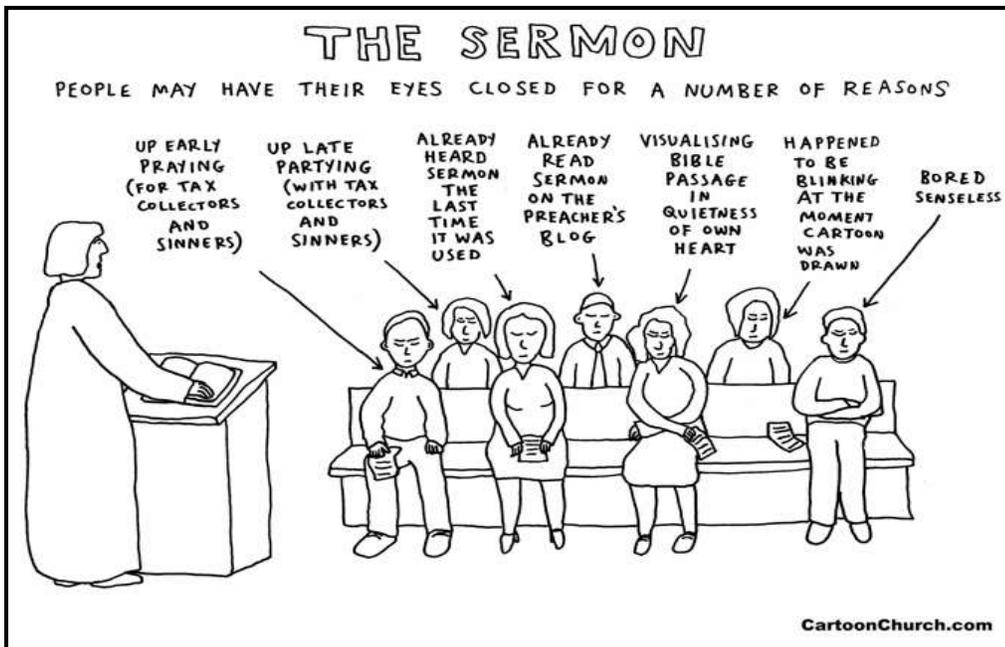
21 Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

22 Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. "How can this be?" they asked. "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

23 Then he said, "You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself'—meaning, 'Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.' 24 But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown.

25 "Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. 27 And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian."

28 When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. 29 Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, 30 but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.



The Day Nobody Slept Through the Sermon

Thanks to Dave Walker, a regular with the Church of England, whose website, CartoonChurch.com, is always good for some laughing at ourselves in Church World.

I've always said that if a person is sleeping in church during the sermon, they probably need the rest. But if that person sleeping during the sermon is the pastor, then he or she needs to find a different line of work.

Nobody was sleeping in the synagogue at Nazareth on that Sabbath day when Jesus, the hometown boy, read the Scripture and delivered the sermon.

The outcome was mob action with intent to murder the preacher!

What in world made the congregation "furious"?

Our English translations of the Bible don't help us very much here. The Greek language behind the congregational reaction to Jesus is much more nuanced than our Bibles indicate.

This is Luke 4:22 from the *New Living Translation*.

Everyone spoke well (*martureo*) of him and was amazed (*thoumazo*) by the gracious words (*logoi tais karitos*) that came from his lips.

I've included a transliteration for the Greek words.

Our Bibles have chosen to translate *martureo* as "spoke well of him." Actually, the word means to bear witness about or testify about. It can mean "to praise", but it also can mean "to condemn" or "bear witness against."

And the word translated "amazed" (*thoumazo*), similarly, has a range of meaning from admiration to skepticism and opposition.

Luke also uses this phrase (*logoi tais karitos*) at Acts 14:3,4; Acts 20:24,32. It is that experience of recognizing that the words *of* the preacher are not just words made up *by* the preacher, but somehow, we recognize that God is speaking to us. The people in Nazareth were provoked by Jesus' preaching about God's grace of redemption.

My paraphrase of Luke 4:22 would go something like this:

Everyone was talking about Jesus -- some praised him and others criticized him; some admired what he said and others thought he had gone way too far. Pretty much all of them were provoked by the God-given words coming from his lips.

Why were they provoked?

I can think of three things right away:

1. When he read the Scripture from Isaiah 61, he omitted the ending of verse 2. These people would know this Scripture. It was their Scripture. It was the promise of God to them. So, he announced the year of God's favor, the jubilee of salvation and deliverance, but he skipped the part about God's vengeance against their enemies.

2. As we see from the rest of this passage, they wanted Jesus to do for them some of the miracles they heard he had done in other towns nearby. They wanted to turn the power of God into a commodity they could conjure up by a simple request. After all, they were God's chosen people, right? And at this very point Jesus gave two examples from the history of his own people, the Jewish people, that really got their shorts in a knot. One example was the prophet Elijah who was sent, not to help the people of Israel during a great famine, but he was sent to a foreigner, a widow in Zarephath, in the land of Sidon (1 Kings 17:1-9). The second example was a military commander from Aram (what we would call Syria) who was healed by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-16). What had them so furious was that Jesus was pointing out God had a long history of moving beyond the chosen people to show his mercy and grace, his salvation and deliverance, were intended for all people. Israel's chosenness was not a reward; it was a commission to bless the rest of the world in God's name and with God's power.
3. What made it all worse was that Jesus was the hometown boy who was busting the chops of the hometown crowd. "Isn't this just Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22b). Mark's Gospel records overhearing somebody else in the crowd: "He's just a carpenter; the (illegitimate) son of Mary" (Mark 6:3)

And so, by the time Jesus finished speaking, it says, "the people in the synagogue were furious" (Luke 4:28)

When Our Religion is Two Sizes Too Small

The folks gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth on that Sabbath day had succumbed to an all-too-familiar condition that afflicts religious people - maybe even us. Familiarity with Scripture, worship, sermons, prayer, serving -- just hanging around churches for very long can, unexpectedly and often without being recognized, anesthetize us to the truth.

In his sermon on that Sabbath, Jesus had actually only reminded the people of the relentless grace of God that moves beyond the boundaries. "The long-expected day of God's salvation is here!" Jesus proclaimed. And the people shouted, "Amen!" The old people shook off their sleepiness. The children sat up. Everyone leaned forward.

"Yes," Jesus continued, "just as the saving love of God moved beyond our self-satisfied ancestors and reached a foreign widow in Zarephath, just as the healing grace of God reached to a Syrian terrorist, yes, the grace of God is flowing like a river for all and everyone who receives it.

And the silence was deafening. The word of the Lord had been unleashed. They knew it. They didn't like it. It cut through their self-satisfied faith. So, they tried to kill him.

Think about our own history:

Bishop William Willimon observed that Martin Luther King, Jr., did not come preaching something new. He came shouting something we already knew: "You have said in your very own Declaration of Independence that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all are created equal, and I insist that you either live by your own words or be declared a fraud." And we killed him, because King told us what we already knew. But we had found ways to conveniently take the self-evident truths for ourselves while withholding them from others. The religiously-observant folks of Nazareth who first greeted Jesus with "Amen" finally yelled, "Kill him!" because he painfully reminded them of what they

already knew, namely, that the God of Israel is free and moving beyond our boundaries with saving grace.

When we read through the New Testament, the gospels, the Book of Acts, and the various letters to churches and individuals, it is abundantly clear that the reaction to Jesus ranges from those who gladly receive him, to those who postpone any sort of commitment one way or another, and on to those who actively reject him. It is often the religious people who most strongly oppose the movement of God's grace to reach beyond what seem to them to be the conventional boundaries of and self-respecting God.

So how about us?

- Our Jesus is too small if he is just a team mascot who makes us feel good about ourselves and our team.
- Our salvation is too small if it is really another exercise in self-congratulation and affirmation.
- Our faith is too small if it is only a security blanket to comfort us when we are anxious.
- Our mission is too small if it is limited to having a viable religious organization on the corner of Dole and Crystal Lake Avenue.

C.S. Lewis, in his classic description of Christian faith, entitled *Mere Christianity*, puts the ongoing choice before each of us this way:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Religion is not a destination, it is a foundation.

Church is not a place you go but a journey you are on.

This is a "come and go" congregation:

Jesus invites each of us and all of us:

Come to me, all of you who are burdened and weary, and I will give you rest

And Jesus commissions us:

Go, and make disciples of all the various kinds of people throughout the world.

Our religious practices of engaging Scripture, prayer, worship, community, giving, and serving, are, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, experiences that recondition and recommission us for the healing of the world in Jesus' name.

This morning we are coming to the Lord's table. Most of us have done this many, many times. So many times, in fact, that the long prayer we pray prior to coming forward may have become religious background noise -- sort of audible wallpaper that is no longer an actual prayer, a real request for God's amazing grace to be poured out upon us and through us.

Join me then, in making this prayer our remembering and requesting before God. Let the Holy Spirit expand your faith, widen your horizon, embolden your expectations of your own place, this church's role, in God's relentless mission to love and save the world.