**THE UNACCEPTABLE PROPHET**

Sermon for January 30, 2022

* Jesus Christ is coming again to restore all things, and make all things right we look forward to that day and may it come quickly
* When Jesus came 2000 years ago his hometown rejected him and no honor was found there for him.
* Today I want to talk about some of those events in his first coming and his early ministry.

We often say the phrase “too close to home” when we go through something embarrassing or uncomfortable that affects us directly in a personal way. A situation that would have made us shake our heads even when this is how Christ would have wanted it to be. Amidst our various personal experiences, let us continue to embrace the truth that our Father’s love is perfect and that he will always pursue to take us home with him.

This week’s theme is **speaking God’s word boldly**. The Bible is full of accounts of people who stood up to boldly speak God’s word.

* God empowered Moses to speak boldly
* God empowered Elijah to speak boldly
* God empowered Jeremiah to speak whatever he was commanded to say.
* Paul reminds us that only the words empowered by God’s love will remain.
* Our text today is taken for Luke which refers to Jesus as a prophet who speaks gracious word even while facing fierce opposition from his home town.
* He is often referred to by his opposition as AN UNACCEPTABLE PROPHET which is the title of my message today.
* My reading from today is taken from Luke 4:21-30

**LK 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. (NRSV)**

Today’s message comes to us around the midpoint of the Epiphany season. We have been covering mostly with Luke this Epiphany season and today we will use Luke’s account to travel with Jesus as he returns to his hometown.

* Luke begins the narrative talking about the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.
* Because of this we can look at this story through the eyes of Jesus and his ministry to see what we can learn.
* Remember, during the season of Epiphany we are looking at Jesus to see the mystery of God’s glory that he reveals.
* When we have a story about Jesus recorded in Scripture, we are seeing into the very heart of God, who He is and who we are in relationship to him.
* We will keep our eyes open for that perspective.
* In addition, we will be able to gain some insights into the ministry of the church as it participates in Jesus’ continuing ministry by the Spirit in our day and age.

Let’s dig a little deeper into our scripture passage for today

**LK 4:2121Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (NRSV)**

* For some context, Luke had just told the story of Jesus’ triumph in the wilderness over the devil’s temptations.
* Then Luke records Jesus as being “filled with the power of the Spirit” and returning to Galilee (Luke 4:14).

**LK 4:14 14Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.**

* Then in a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus delivers his inaugural message.
* He does this by using a passage in Isaiah where good news is proclaimed.
* This message is well received, and everyone is excited about what they are hearing.
* But in today’s message he uses two other passages that have the opposite effect.
* We will see that epiphanies can often get a hostile reaction from eyes burned by the light that have been in darkness.
* But before we get to that reaction, we see first that the congregation responds positively.

**LK 4:2222All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”**

**(NRSV)**

* Their rhetorical question about Jesus’ lineage is not to be understood in a negative sense, like it does in Mark’s account.
* No, for Luke, the hometown crowd is not offended by this.
* This is not a case of “familiarity breeds contempt.” Rather, the way Luke is telling it, the hometown crowd sees this as an opportunity that is TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.
* If Jesus is all that he just proclaimed himself to be, a herald of good news, the Lord’s anointed, who proclaims the benefits and blessings of the Lord’s favor, then certainly this means his own longtime neighbors and family will be the main recipients—perhaps the only recipients.
* It is like hearing of an old high school buddy who just won the lottery and now everybody thinks they are entitled to some preferential treatment.
* **A question I have for you is have you ever witnessed the dynamic of a neighbor or family member reaching some level of success and everyone close to them wants PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT.**
	+ It seems Jesus hometown was excited to finally have someone like Jesus representing them.
	+ Maybe try and imagine what they were expecting from him.
* **Maybe try to imagine some of the assumptions his hometown had about him, about themselves and others beyond their village.**
	+ Can you relate to those whose assumptions were exposed by Jesus?
	+ Why was this experience painful for them?



* + Think about it:
		- We finally have our hometown hero (maybe the Messiah they were thinking)
		- Yet this Jesus is not getting rid of the Romans
		- And he may be bringing salvation, we are his special people so why is he giving it to the Gentiles.
		- They want Jesus to show how special they are since they are his hometown, and now he almost seems to be embarrassing them.
* But Jesus knows their hearts and he anticipates their reaction.
* He also knows they need to see that he is not the son of Joseph, but the Son of God.

**LK 4:2323He 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.” (NRSV)**

* There is nothing more frustrating than someone putting words in your mouth that say the very thing you’d rather keep concealed.
* Jesus hits his mark. The proverb “Doctor, cure yourself” means that the one who can heal or be a benefactor should take care of his own.
* It is not implying that Jesus has a problem that he needs to attend to first.
* Jesus’ next statement about Capernaum is clearer.
* If Jesus has done wonderful miracles in Capernaum, then certainly he should do the same in his own backyard.
* And maybe there is more to it than that.



**Capernaum, since it was situated along one of the major international highways that connected Egypt with Mesopotamia, tended to attract a wider diversity of people.**

* This meant that its population was made up of both Jews, and to their discomfort, Gentiles—and lots of them.
* Capernaum in this story serves as a contrast to the hometown Jews of Nazareth.
* If Jesus is doing miracles in such a questionable place like Capernaum, then he will have to prove his loyalty to his own hometown by doing the same in Nazareth.
* But Jesus will not be manipulated by the assumptions of people who thought they knew him best.

**LK 4:24 24And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. (NRSV)**

* The irony of this statement is that the word “accepted” here is the same word used in verse 19 where Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah.
* The prophet who is to proclaim the “acceptable” year of the Lord is himself not “accepted” by his own people.
* And with Jesus equating himself to a prophet, we get one of our epiphanies about Jesus’ ministry.
* It’s a prophetic ministry.
* This means that Jesus is the proclamation of the kingdom.
* He is God’s Word spoken to us, proclaiming the good news to the whole world—Gentiles included.

**There is no other word spoken to us that gives us the proclamation that brings healing, release from prison, sight to the blind or freedom from oppression.**

* As we, the church, participate in Jesus’ continuing ministry, we find that it has not changed.
* We too are to proclaim the kingdom in Jesus Christ.
* This means we point to Jesus in all that we say and do.
* We don’t proclaim ourselves or any other counterfeit “good news.”

**Notice how Jesus goes about the business of proclaiming in his prophetic ministry:**

* He uses the Scriptures. Todays message talks about a hostile response Jesus got by quoting from First and Second Kings.
* God’s Word always gets a response.
* Sometimes positive, sometimes negative.
* This is an important “epiphany” to remember when proclaiming the good news.

**As members of the church, we are not trying to get a response**—

* we are only trying to be faithful in proclaiming the Word.
* The response will follow, and we have no control over it.

Let’s see the passages Jesus uses to expose the hearts of those in his hometown.

**LK 4:25-27 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.”  (NRSV)**

* Jesus here reminds them of two stories of the prophets Elijah and Elisha who were rejected by their own people.
* The first story is about Elijah providing an unending supply of food for a lowly Gentile widow and her son.
	+ - In this story no provision is made for any of the Israelites.
		- This is found in 1 Kings 17:8-16.



* + - This account talks of a time when severe famine came upon the land.
		- God directed Elijah to go to Zarephath in Sidon, where he meets a widow gathering firewood
		- He asks her for some water and bread something no one had in a famine.
		- The widow gave it to him knowing that her son and her would have no food left after that.
		- Because she helped Elijah God promised the jar of meal would never go empty until the famine ended.
		- Imagine you keep taking food out of the jar but it keeps filling up.
	+ In the second story Jesus refers to the story of Elisha, who healed Naaman, a Syrian army officer who had leprosy.
		- This story is found in 2 Kings 5:1-14.



* + In this story Naaman a commander of the army of the King of Aram was a great military man, his one problem however was he suffered from leprosy.
	+ In one of their raids they had taken a girl captive from Israel.
	+ However it worked out this girl became a slave in the household of Naaman and served his wife.
	+ The slave girl mentioned to Naaman’s wife if only he could get to Elisha the prophet Naaman could be healed.
	+ The King of Aram allowed Naaman to travel to Israel gave him a letter from himself and sent 10 talents of silver, 6000 shekels of gold and clothing garments as a gift.
	+ He wanted to see Naaman healed, his gift for the healing was to give
		- 10 talents of silver = $150,000 USD
		- 6000 shekels of gold = $3,000,000 USD
		- Plus other high end garments.
	+ So Naaman presented the king with the letter he go very excited tore his clothes
		- He said I am not God to give healing, and he did not believe God heals.
		- He also felt the king of Aram was picking a fight with him.
	+ When Elisha head what had happened he ask the King of Israel to send Naaman to him.
	+ Naaman with all his chariots and horses drove to Elisha’s house.
	+ That must have been quite the picture with this entourage arriving in the middle of nowhere.
		- Elisha did not even meet him but sent a message to go wash in the Jordan 7 times and his flesh would be restored.
		- Naaman expected some big fanfare as he was healed.
		- That did not impress Naaman, it was like telling him to go have a bath in the Jordan, not just once but 7 times.
		- Naaman was very angry rode off in a rage.
		- But on their way back to Aram the were going right by the Jordan river, and his servants and children convinced him to dip in the Jordan 7 times.
		- We all know the story after Naaman emerged out of the river the 7th time he was healed – CURED OF LEPROSY
	+ Both stories show that the grace and favor God pours out was to THEIR ENEMIES, weak and strong alike.
	+ Israel expected special treatment, however here God did powerful miracles in the lands of the Gentiles or their enemies.

**Notice something about these two miracles, the miracle with the widow of Zaraphath happened outside of Israel (see the map)**

* It didn’t happen with God’s called out people



* Also the second event Jesus brought up was the healing of Naaman, who was not an Israelite, but a Gentile, and enemy.



* There empire like to come plunder in the land of Israel.
* It is shown in the color green probably around modern day Syria.
* Again the healing was with one of the Israelites enemies
* It was not with the Isrealites who felt entitled to the only healings and miracles.

**The proclamation Jesus has is of a Father who does not show partiality.**

* This did not fit well with the Jews’ expectation of the Messiah.
* The Messiah was supposed to come and destroy Israel’s enemies, not bless them.
* The Jewish people of that time pretty much had two basic beliefs about the Messiah.
	+ - First, every generation believed that the Messiah would come soon and probably in their lifetime.
		- Second, this soon-coming Messiah would vanquish the Gentiles and bless and restore Israel.
* We must not forget that Jesus promises are not just to us BUT TO ALL MANKIND.
	+ It is easy to think about what we need and want
	+ While failing to love or help the hurting world around us.
	+ Jesus died for the least in our communities, he died for others that may have hurt us or are hurting us.

**Jesus’ proclamation that “Today” this time of blessing had come fit nicely with their first expectation.**

* + But by announcing that “no prophet is accepted” and using Elijah and Elisha blessing Gentiles over Jews,
	+ Jesus completely shattered their second expectation.
	+ Here is their reaction.

**LK 4:28-29**

**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. (NRSV)**

* It is hard to imagine how the home town turned on him. How they reacted so violently to Jesus.
* What expectations were shatter and why were they so offended?
* What about us CAN WE THINK OF A TIME WHEN WE WERE ANGERED BECAUSE JESUS DID NOT DO SOMETHING ON OUR TERMS?
	+ Maybe it was we weren’t healed
	+ Maybe a loved one died
	+ Maybe our job got terminated
	+ Maybe a marriage ended

**The proclamation of the universal nature of the Father’s favor turns their initial favor of Jesus into outright hatred.**

* They wanted to “hurl him off a cliff.”
* Like Satan who wanted Jesus to prove himself by throwing himself down from the temple, these Jews wanted the Messiah to answer to them and fulfill their expectations.
* This is an extreme hostile reaction.
* But Jesus did not soft-pedal what they needed to hear.
* He did not shy away from offending their pride and hurting their self-centered identities.
* True prophets are like that.
* They proclaim God’s word without compromise.
* MAY WE AS A CHURCH DO SO TODAY even when our “hometown” turns hostile.
* Jesus had a ministry of PROCLAIMATION – the same ministry he expects his church and its members to have.
* Jesus didn’t just call us to feed us and entertain us but he NOW SENDS US OUT TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS.
* Jesus said in:

**JN 20:21**… **As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”**

**Unfortunately, the very favor and blessing Jesus’ hometown wanted Jesus to give was rejected.** Jesus is the Father’s favor that is proclaimed.

* Like the hometown Jews, we too can fail to receive this favor when we WANT IT IN OUR OWN TERMS.
* When we HARBOR HATRED in our hearts towards those who have hurt us, we are not receiving the favor the Lord graciously pours out on all.
* When we size up our neighbors as people beyond the reach of God’s grace, we expose our own hearts of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.
* We do not know who God is calling, however we are to continue doing the work
	+ At Legagy church did a few neighborhood visit to surrounding community. I remember one household and hesitated to drop of a flyer, because in my heart I judge they would never come.
	+ I was wrong they were the first one to come and join us for dinner at church.
	+ We can never outguess GOD.
* When we determine who is worthy of God’s favor, we bring ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS that are out of line with God’s grace.

**It is not up to us to draw lines of division**

* between who is poor and who is rich,
* who is blind and who is enlightened,
* who is in captivity and who is free,
* who is the oppressed and who is the oppressor.
* Who is doing okay and who is helpless
* those who are troubled
* those who are grieving
* those who are victims, the fatherless, the orphans and the homeless
* Jesus Christ laid his life down for ALL MANKIND, in whatever situation they find themselves in.

**Jesus is the Prophet who comes**

* to proclaim good news to the poor,
* to proclaim release to the captives and
* recovery of sight to the blind and
* to let the oppressed go free.

**He’s the only one who proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord, and that proclamation is made to all**.

* But what if we are like Jesus’ hometown and we struggle to accept it?
* We have one final verse to consider.

**LK 4:30 30But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way. (NRSV)**

* This passage ends with Jesus escaping being hurled down the cliff by somehow slipping through the crowd and going on his way.
* Throughout Luke’s Gospel we see Jesus go through the crowd many times, all the way to the cross.
* Nothing could stop Jesus from doing that will of his Father, he accomplished the task he was sent to the earth to complete.
* Nothing will stop the favor of the Father being poured out on all his children.
* Even the animosity we have towards him does not prevent God’s favor toward us.
* In this incident Jesus PASSED THROUGH THE MIDST OF THEM, I CAN SEE THEM ALL SAYING, WHERE DID HE GO??
* As one Bible translation put it “He passed right through the crowd and walked away”
* I wonder what excuse they made for losing him

**We need to praise God that Jesus is the Prophet sent to us.**

* His word trumps any word we try to give ourselves and any word we try to give each other that is not from him.
* We can pray,
	+ - thy will be done,
		- because his will is perfect and brings light to our darkness,
		- even when the light hurts.
		- He loves us that much and he is faithful.

**As we come to believe and receive this amazing grace, we can then turn to our neighbors and even to our enemies with the same grace, forgiveness and favor the Father has for us.**

* In doing so we join Jesus in proclaiming the good news of his kingdom.

**CLOSING PRAYER**