

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

A HOME FOR EPIPHANY AND ETERNITY

Luke 4:21-30

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Analysis by Kris Wright

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 home town 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 home town. 25But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for 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.

[From Epiphany 3:

18'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go
free,
[to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.]*

DIAGNOSIS: Jesus Unwelcome, Made Homeless

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Blinded by Familiarity*

It began well enough. They all “Witnessed to him and were amazed at his words of grace.” But what they witness and the truth that stood before them were two different things. Blinded by familiarity, they see that “Joe’s boy,” the hometown kid, makes good. They do not see the Messiah, the One God “has anointed (Messiahed) to proclaim (and inaugurate) a year ‘acceptable to the Lord!’” What they see in Jesus is someone who belongs to them, someone on whom they have a special claim. They expect at least as much favor as he showed the neighbors, who are newcomers to Jesus. Don’t those who have known him since childhood deserve special favor? We Christians, we mainline denominations may well ask ourselves what or who we witness to when we see Jesus. Do we see someone who belongs to us, someone on whom we have special claim? We have known him longer. In this case, is it possible that familiarity breeds – if not contempt at least – complacency?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Unfavorable*

Deeper than the familiarity which claims Jesus as their (our) own, is the resentment and jealousy at the thought that Jesus has taken the favor of the Lord to those who are less deserving, or worse yet, undeserving. Even more insulting is that Jesus uses the very word of God, their own Scriptures, to prove that they, the hometown folk, are not God’s favorites, that God’s

prophets, in fact, have often brought blessings to outsiders. The same Scriptures they use to draw boundaries that claim their special privilege, Jesus uses to expand his kingdom to include all who will hear and see, friend and foe alike. This is unacceptable, and so Jesus is not accepted. What Scriptures do we use to draw boundaries, expecting God to adhere to those boundaries?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Fit to Kill*

There is no fury like a community scorned, especially a community condemned by their own Scriptures. Jealousy and resentment blocks them from hearing or seeing the Good News in Jesus. In fact, there is no Good News for them in what Jesus proclaims. Resentment leads to rage. Fred Craddock says, “Anger and violence are the last defense of those who are made to face their own tradition” (Interpretation Bible Commentaries, Luke). Jesus told them the “God’s honest truth” so clearly they were fit to kill. They became so enraged they drove him to a hill out of town to stone him. But Jesus escapes – this time. He passes through their midst and goes on his way, and they do not follow. Having driven away their only hope for ever knowing the favor of God they crave, those who thought they deserved special privilege are left with nothing – captives all, alone, poor, blind, and “fit to kill.” In making Jesus unwelcome at home, we make ourselves homeless as well.

PROGNOSIS: Jesus Welcomes Us, Takes Us Home

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Jesus Goes His Way For Us*

Even knowing they mean to kill him, Jesus cannot leave his people prisoners of their own sin. He does, indeed, go his Way. He is led to another hill outside another city, and there he is killed. There he does pass through death itself, even for, especially for those who killed him. This is the Good News God

has anointed him to proclaim, not only in word, but in deed, not only in life, but in death. Jesus has come to set the prisoners free, to bring sight to the blind, and life to us all – neighbors, friend, foe, newcomers, old timers. All are favorites of God. Jesus takes us all home to his Father.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Favored

We are all hometown folk! No need for jealousy and resentment. There is no limit to God's favor, his love. Now we read all of Scripture through the lens of Jesus and his Way – the Cross. And when we read that God intends to save the world, even our enemies, through Jesus, that is Good News for us, too. No need for boundaries or special privilege. God's grace is sufficient.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Now We See!

We witness to Jesus as Messiah, not only yours, mine and our, but theirs. In our baptism, our dying and rising with him, Jesus has anointed us to proclaim the Good News that those who once were blind now see, that those who are oppressed and in the prison of sin have been set free. Now it is our turn to proclaim that, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." This Christ is for you!