

**JEREMIAH 1:4-10 (p.612)**

**JANUARY 30, 2022**

**LUKE 4:14-30 (p.834)**

**BLAINE**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

We are here to listen, Lord. And more importantly, to hear. We are here to discern your Call on our lives, to experience your Presence, and then to reflect your Presence out into this world. So, to that end, Lord, we ask for your guidance as we study together this morning. And we ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

**“CALLED FOR A PURPOSE”**

It was a local paper! Similar to the Benzie County Record Patriot! Only it was a Special Addition! Front page! Above the Fold! The Headline read, “**LOCAL MAN, HERO OF CAPERNAUM!**” The article said, “Jesus, son of Joseph, a young man from right here in Nazareth, has wowed the crowds, time and time again! This rising star from our very own region of the Country, a tradesman by birth and a Rabbi by training, has caused all of us here to well-up with pride! He heals people from their maladies and afflictions! He is hands-down the greatest physician who ever lived! His religious teaching is amazing! His grasp of the Scripture is simply profound! And His faith, well, that speaks for itself!”

“Where did He get such authority? How did He acquire this vast knowledge? When did He amass this power? Those who see Him are instantly in awe! Those who hear Him speak, are moved to conviction! And He is from right here, from our own hometown! What a blessing it is for those of us who call our self a Nazarene! What will our lives be like, now that He's home?” ...That's the context, the setting, as Jesus stands up in the Synagogue to teach. Try to imagine what that was like.

In the First Century World, honor and shame were the “pillars of status”. For this local man to “Shine like the Sun” over in Capernaum, performing miracle after miracle, would be a tremendous source of pride for those in His hometown of Nazareth. Jesus has made a definite splash! Those in the marketplace could talk off little else! Word about Him traveled fast and far! And now He is home, right here, on the Sabbath no less, teaching in the Synagogue! Verse 22 exclaims, “All spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips”!

Picture what it was like. Especially for those with afflictions. The Great Physician is here, in our midst! He healed people over in Capernaum, and now He is home, here in Nazareth! Maybe He’ll do it again? Maybe He’ll heal everyone in town? Maybe He’ll heal me? I could be free of this Leprosy! I’d be able to walk again! I will finally be able to see! Imagine the stir, as Jesus stands up in the Synagogue to speak!

It would be like Mercy Sobkoviak or Jim Bekkering coming back from Nashville with a Platinum record in tow, and starting their World Concert Tour right here at Blaine! But that’s coupled with Taylor Nye discovering the cure for COVID, then coming here to start a Church Medical Program! But in addition, Deb Kessler winning the Nobel Peace Prize, and Willy Bradford, the MVP Quarterback in the Super Bowl, and Frank Putney, discovering a way to power automobiles with just water, all coming together to share this Sunday’s Sermon! You’d be excited, right? You’d have to be! Awe and Amazement would permeate the air! Think of the Joy and Anticipation, your heart welling up with Pride! No wonder everyone spoke well of Him!

Did you notice though, that Luke doesn't tell us what Jesus did over in Capernaum that so amazed these home-town folks? Mark details five full chapters of healing and miracles and parables, prior to Jesus coming back to where He grew up. And Matthew shares almost thirteen! Luke, however, just mentions a few sentences. "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread throughout the whole countryside. He was teaching in their Synagogues, and everyone praised Him!"

Luke does clearly imply though that whatever Jesus did, those living in Nazareth thought He would repeat it there. And he does mention later, several healings along the shore of Galilee—casting out demons, healing a leper, even helping a paralytic to walk! We know that it was near Capernaum that Jesus fed the multitudes with just a few fish and couple of loaves of bread. And by the Sea of Galilee that He called His first Disciples to step out in faith and follow Him. But we are not sure what Jesus did prior to coming back to Nazareth.

The crowds were sure excited that He was there, though. Luke makes that very clear. All eyes were on Him, as He stood up in the Synagogue on the Sabbath to read from the Scroll of the Prophet Isaiah! A hushed silence fell over the entire crowd! You could have heard a pin drop! ...And then the next day, in the Sunday Nazareth Times, the headlines read; **CROWDS MOB PREACHER! RABBI BARELY ESCAPES DEATH! SYNAGOGUE MEMBERS ATTEMPT TO THROW CARPENTER OFF A CLIFF!**

So, what happened? How did everyone go from shouting “Halleluiah” one day, to attempted murder the next? And with just a sermon, I might add nervously! “All spoke well of Him,” it says in verse twenty-two. But then, in verse twenty-eight it says “all the people in the synagogue were furious”! What happened in those six verses? How did the crowds, who were so thrilled with Jesus one minute, become so filled with hatred the next? We just read it, didn’t we? Some of you may still have it open in front of you! At first everyone wanted to put Jesus up on a massive pedestal! But then, they all want to heave Him over the side of a cliff! What changed? How did all those in the Synagogue go from “enamored”, to “livid”, with just a few sentences?

You know, I’ve heard this Scripture passage quoted often! “A Prophet has no honor in his own hometown.” Maybe you have too? But I’m not sure I’ve ever heard it explained? So maybe a better question might be, “how do I share this Truth, without getting myself thrown off a cliff?”

That happens, you know. At least metaphorically. When someone says something that people don’t want to hear, ...well, you know. And this is a Theological “Biggie”! A Pedagogical “In your Face”! An Ontological “Sit Up and Pay Attention”! And yes, I used all of those big words on purpose! Maybe to try to keep my seat in the Synagogue? You see what Jesus says here has huge ramifications for those who wish to follow Him! Only it’s not very popular. It wasn’t back then, and it’s certainly not today. But it is clear, isn’t it? What Jesus says is, “This isn’t really about you!”

You know, that might be the least-popular thing that anyone could say, don't you think? "This isn't really about you!" Here they are expecting a Super Star to come into their world and make everything better. From where they stand, they've won the Religious Powerball drawing! They are anxious for all of their worries and cares to simply disappear! Anxious to be healed! Anxious to start living on "easy street"! Only what Jesus says is, "I am not a Genie in a Bottle! Your wish is not my command! This isn't a traveling circus, and I am certainly no Clown! Everything that I do is designed to give Glory to God!"

I mean, look at the text. Up until that point, everything was fine. People seem to have no problem with Jesus talking about Preaching Good News to the poor, or Freedom for Prisoners, or the recovery of Sight for the Blind! They are even okay with Jesus equating Himself with the Suffering Servant predicted by Isaiah! They didn't balk when He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me", or when He said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing!", implying that He is the Messiah! I used to think that was the issue, but it's not! It was after that, that Luke says, "All spoke well of Him"!

No, the shift came when Jesus got to the part about Blessings and Miracles, Wonders and Signs, not being an end, in and of themselves. But rather, Prophetic Signs that point to something else! That's when they got mad. Everything I do, says Jesus, serves a bigger purpose. And if you want to follow me, then you need to have that same purpose as well!

My mission is not about “healing the blind”, or “helping the lame to walk”—but rather about making God known by “healing the blind” and “helping the lame to walk!” I wasn’t called to “feed the hungry”, but to demonstrate the Love of God by “feeding the hungry”! There is a difference, isn’t there? And that’s where Jesus got into trouble!

All of the profound teachings, says the Lord, and all of the miraculous healings—those witnessed to in Scripture, which you have studied all of your lives—as well as those that I have done recently—may indeed be edifying to you personally, because you are associated with me. But that’s not the point! No, the point is, to witness to my Father in Heaven! Nothing that I do is about “what I do”! And none of it is about you! And that’s where people start to get mad!

Elijah was sent to help an unknown Gentile Widow, Jesus reminds them. But she wasn’t the only Widow back then. She wasn’t even from Israel. And Elisha was summoned to cleanse an Army Commander—a Commander of a Gentile king—a king from Syria. Only he wasn’t the only Leper back then either. Those miracles, says Jesus, recorded in Sacred Scripture, have nothing to do with these individuals! Nothing to do with you, as God’s Chosen People even! But rather, everything to do with God! Can you imagine!

People back then were no different than people today. We all have a tendency to see ourselves as the center of the universe. It’s our “wants and needs” that we think about first! It’s called Narcissism. And I would say it is the single biggest problem in the world today! Maybe it was back then too?

If there is Teaching to be done, then by golly it ought to be done right here in Nazareth! And if there are healings to be performed, well, there are plenty of people close-by who need help! You can see it, can't you? I picture people lining up on the streets outside of the Synagogue that day, waiting for Jesus to finish Teaching so that He can come and Heal what ails them. Only what He says, in just a couple of sentences really, is that a focus on the Miracles, rather than on the Miracle Worker, is completely misplaced! And that really upsets them!

There were all kinds of Lepers in the days of Naaman, right, says Jesus. In fact, there were all kinds of Lepers right here at home, in Israel. But per God's command, as part of His plan to make Himself known, Elisha was sent to heal one from Syria. And there were all kinds of people suffering from famine in the days of Elijah. But that one woman and her son from Zarephath, those outsiders, is where Elijah was called to go. I realize that now that I have Healed a number of people over in Capernaum that that is what you want me to do here as well. But I am telling you, right here and now, in the House of God, that Miracles are not about the Miracles! They are about making God known in the world!

That Truth isn't very popular! Even today! It's where "Liberation Theology", and the "Social Gospel" break down! It's where the "Prosperity Gospel", and the "Feel Good About Yourself Gospel" all fall apart! This isn't about us, and what we can get! It is not even about what we do for others! Yeah, we are supposed to love our neighbor! And yeah, we are supposed to even love ourselves! But the purpose in doing these things is to point to God! You can see why they wanted to throw Him off of a cliff, can't you?

Consider what He said, though! God healing that Widow gave Elijah credibility as a spokesman for God. The ultimate purpose, however, was to demonstrate God's Glory. And God healing a foreign military commander, showed that Elisha spoke for God. But again, Elisha's message is about God, not about himself. And when Jesus feeds the five thousand, it's not to fulfill an earthly need. He does it to point to God! I mean, there would have been hungry people there again the next day, right?

Was that wedding at Cana the only one that ever ran out of wine? Was Blind Bartimaeus the only person on the streets of Jericho who didn't have sight? Was Lazarus, the man who Jesus called forth from the tomb, the only friend of His who had ever died? Didn't Lazarus eventually die anyway? As did Peter's mother-in-law, by-the-way! As did the woman who was hemorrhaging, and Jairus' daughter! Then those Miracles were really meant to point to something else, right, something beyond the Miracles themselves? Which means your life, and my life, as the Miracle that they are intended to be, are also designed to point to something else! God has a plan! And we have a purpose!

Do you think Jeremiah, in our first reading this morning, realized that? I mean he didn't exactly shout for joy when the Word of the Lord came to him, did he? No, he resisted the Call. "Oh, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak. I am only a child". He must have somehow understood that to be Called by God would not necessarily make his life easier and more fulfilling. Glory and Honor were not going to come to him. In fact, it might just be the opposite! Things might be far more difficult for Jeremiah. So, he balked, right?

But God sent him anyway. “You must go to everyone I send you to, and say whatever I command you”. You see, this really isn’t about you Jeremiah. Moses, likewise, when he was called, sounded pretty much the same. “Who am I Lord, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? Suppose they question me? What shall I say? What if they don’t believe me, Lord? What if they don’t listen to me? I have never been eloquent you know. I am slow of speech and tongue. Please Lord, can’t you just send someone else”. But God sent him anyway. In essence, saying, it’s not about you Moses.

Jonah tried to run away, remember? But he found himself in the belly of a fish, and then vomited up on shore. Isaiah said, “I’m not worthy Lord. I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips”. Ezekiel fell flat on his face when he was summoned by God. He went, it says, but “in bitterness”, “and in the anger of my spirit”. The Lord’s Hand was “heavy upon him”, we’re told, and he was “overwhelmed”! Those aren’t exactly happy words, are they? But he still went, didn’t he? It’s not about you Ezekiel. It’s not about you Isaiah! It’s not about you Jonah!

In fact, almost all of the “Biblical Greats” tried to resist God’s Call in one way or another. And hardly any of them were really qualified for what they were Called to do, at least not by earthly standards. Amos was a farmer, remember, who tended Sycamore Fig trees. David was a shepherd boy, the youngest of seven sons, who later in life committed both adultery and murder. Moses spent the first forty years of his life living in the lap of luxury in the household of Pharaoh, before he too committed murder, and ended up spending the next forty years eating dust out in the wilderness!

He too was a farmer, tending sheep for his father-in-law Jethro. That is until God sent that darned Burning Bush! And Paul, the guy who wrote most of the New Testament, had a terrible “resume” as far as Apostles go! He persecuted Christians! He was an Ecclesiastical Sherriff, or District Attorney! He worked for the Government! Paul spent years, in great delight, killing Christians or locking them up in chains! That is, until the Word of God knocked him off his donkey! Until he was Called, right? Called for a specific Purpose! Called to be part of the Lord’s Plan! It’s not about you Paul!

Not one of these biblical lessons are about people looking for a more meaningful life, who then somehow found God! They are all lessons about reluctant, half-hearted inductees, who were Called into service by God! God had a Plan in mind! It was God’s idea! It always is! Their lives were not about them at all!

I have Called you, says the Lord, Called you for a Purpose. You must go to everyone I send you to! It’s fairly simple when you get right down to it, isn’t it? And pretty darned clear. It’s not about you, or me, or even us. Only now we have to decide, don’t we? Each one of us! Will you throw the Messenger off of the Cliff, and slowly back away? Or will you instead, embrace Him in Faith, and step out on the Adventure of our Life? And all of God’s people said, Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Lord, receive our silent prayers this morning, and those we lift up as a Community of Faith. Hear the pleas and petitions that we set before your Throne of Grace. Touch us Lord, with the Spirit of your Presence, and guide our steps, our thoughts, and our actions, this week and always. Grant us strength for the journey Lord, and comfort and healing along the way. Smile upon us Lord, and cause us to smile on all those we meet. Use us Lord, as joy-filled instruments of your Peace in a broken world. And fill us with compassion, so that we might shine!

Oh Lord, we live in a troubled and fearful world, so we ask for Wisdom, and Knowledge, and Understanding in order that we might know your Will. We ask for your Blessings to be showered upon this Church, and on all those who enter through its doors. But also, Lord, we ask for this for all those who pass by, and all those who choose to stay away, and for all the people who need a Church Family desperately. We ask that you Empower each of us to reach out to these people in ways that will bring them home, in ways that will lead them into your Loving Arms. In short, Lord, we ask that you will make us Witnesses that point the way to you.

Lord, this morning, we ask especially for your Compassion and your Peace in the lives of those who need it. We ask for your Healing Touch on our bodies and on our minds. We ask for your Face to Shine upon each one of us, on our nation, and on our world, and especially on the lives of .....

And Father, we ask these things in Jesus' Name, as we pray together now the very prayer that He has taught us, saying, Our Father...