

Epiphany 3; January 23 & 24, 2022

Luke 4:14-30

"There's no place like home," at least that is what Dorothy tells us as she clicks her ruby slippers together. But for some, it's not all that easy to go home. I read an article this past week entitled, *"Returning home: What it's like for U.S. Veterans."* In that article, the author speaks about how hard it is for those who have not served in the military to understand what it's like for a soldier to come home. For many, the adjustment from the battlefield to home is not always easy to do. He asks you to think about a job or work experience where you didn't get along with a coworker or didn't see eye-to-eye with your boss. Now imagine you couldn't leave that job; how would you feel?

He speaks about how there is no change and no break. You work with them, you eat with them and you live with them. If you can't stand them, oh well..... There isn't even the escape of going home at the end of the day or having a weekend. A soldier can often find themselves in a location that even the locals don't like them or even go so far as hating them. He may find himself in a situation where you have to fight; and as bad as that sounds he may find himself or herself where you must kill or be killed. For some, that experience can change them forever. Even though they love coming home and receiving a hero's welcome, they also realize that everyone around them has changed as well. It was a fascinating article to see how difficult it can be to once again come home.

As I read that article, I couldn't help but think how it was for Jesus to return home in our text today. Jesus is in the very early stages of his ministry. Luke writes: **"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom."** The people of Nazareth were proud of *their* Jesus, the carpenter's son. The word was getting around about the miracles Jesus was performing such as changing water into wine and healing sick people and casting out evil spirits. Large crowds gathered around him to hear him speak. It should not surprise us that when Jesus came home, they wanted him to read the lessons in the synagogue and it should not surprise us that a large crowd was there. Jesus was making quite a name for himself.

So, he stands up and reads the words of Isaiah 61: **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** The people in Nazareth would have been familiar with these words. They were words that spoke about the coming Messiah. This Messiah was going to proclaim freedom, recovery of sight, set oppressed free and **"proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** That **"year of the Lord's favor"** was also known as a *"Jubilee year."* This year happened every 50 years. It was a year when all debts were forgiven. All land was returned to its original owner. Everybody got a brand-new start – a fresh beginning. This year was meant to picture what the Messiah was going to do when he would come. He would pay the price that God demanded for sin. He was going to make everything new. In a way, everything would be reset again to what it would be like before Adam and Eve had fallen into sin in the Garden of Eden. That Messiah would wipe the slate clean once again.

Jesus finishes reading the scroll, hands it back to the synagogue leader and then sits down to talk to the people of his hometown. All eyes were focused on Jesus. Instead of standing to preach or teach a long sermon or lesson, he speaks 8 simple words: **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** You couldn't miss what Jesus was saying. He couldn't have been clearer. There in his hometown, in front of people that had known him since he was a toddler, he boldly says that he is the Messiah, the Christ, that everyone had been waiting for.

How did they react at first? Luke tells us: **"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips."** Wow. That's a powerful claim for a carpenter from Nazareth. You can almost hear the wheels turning in their heads. **"Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.** How could the son of a carpenter make such a claim? How could Jesus become so wise and strong teacher in God's Word? But this claim was hard for them to swallow. Some became offended by the content of his 8-word sermon.

If they were even going to try to believe this claim of Jesus, they were going to need some proof. Jesus knew what they were thinking. Before they could even say something to Jesus, Jesus speaks to them: **"And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"** In other words: *"if you want us to believe you, you*

have to give us some miracles, Jesus.” As Jesus continued to talk with the people there, things began to change quickly. Not only am I not going to do any miracles for you, you are acting the same way that God’s people acted toward two of the biggest prophets – Elijah and Elisha. Jesus says no to the miracles. He won’t do any miracles for them their hearts were far from God like the people of Elijah’s and Elisha’s day. He goes right for the jugular. He is telling them that unless they deal with their heart issues, repent of their sin and hatred of the Gentiles, they are going to miss out of all the blessings that Jesus brought with him. If you don’t, I will go to those who will. I will go to the Gentiles. Jesus told them that they were not any different than the people in the past who rejected and killed the Old Testament prophets.

What Jesus said to the people of his hometown so shocked them and infuriated them that after the synagogue worship service, they dragged him out of town and tried to throw him over a cliff. They were willing to go as far as saying Jesus was a hero, perhaps even a prophet. They were not at all ready to say that he was the Messiah. These words of Jesus were soundly rejected.

We look at these verses and think, how could they have done that? How could they welcome him home that way? It is almost impossible to see how someone could hate him that much. We might be able to see how the people out in the world react to the words of Jesus. We know that is going to happen. But how about us sitting here this morning? Yet, we do, don’t we? Every time that we choose to not follow the words of Jesus and listen to the temptations of the devil, we are really rejecting Jesus. If we are honest with ourselves, we say words that are hurtful to not only Jesus, but also against God’s people. We sin again and again, going against the words of God.

Yet, Jesus has good news for us. You see on that day that Jesus returned home, it was not the day for Jesus to die. Luke tells us: **“He walked right through the crowd and went on his way.”** In about two and half years later, another mob would come to arrest Jesus. But rather than escape from them, he gives himself up to them and gives his life on the cross so that we might have eternal life. There on that cross he will remove every single sinful act that we have done, every single hurtful word we have spoken. There on the cross of Calvary, we see Jesus go to war for us. Even though we might not be able to fully understand all that Jesus went through for us, just like I may not be able to understand all that a soldier has gone through in war. We cannot fully understand the battle that Jesus fought against Satan. Yet, we can give him thanks for winning the war. Therefore, we truly can say someday: *“there is no place like home.”* Amen.