

Manna Moments

Friday, March 19, 2021

Scripture Luke 4:16-30 (NRSV)

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "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."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He 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.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But 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; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They 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. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Devotional

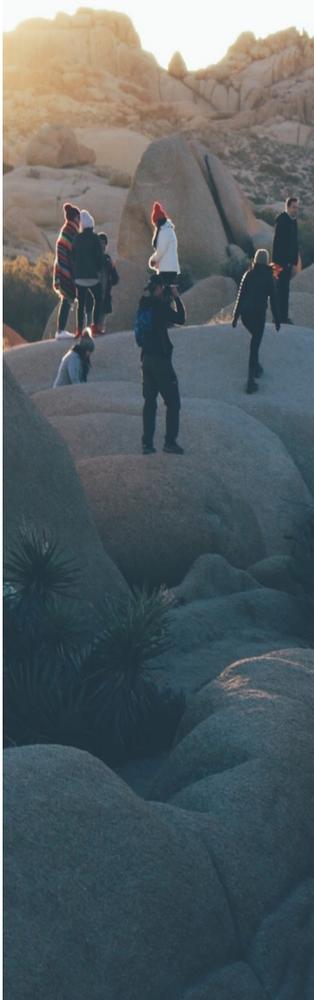
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One of my best friends of nearly 30 years recently received his Ph.D. The next step is to find a way to use that degree, so he recruited my assistance to proof-read his resume. As we went through it together, I felt like a terrible friend. He's done amazing things and worked on some incredible programs, and yet, all this time, he's just been my friend who I've known since high school. Of course, we've talked about our jobs over the years, but seeing his life's work laid out on paper in that way gave me a new appreciation for all that he's accomplished.

I've always known my friend was smart, though, so it wasn't a stretch for me to accept proof of his intelligence and contributions to his field. It was much more difficult, impossible even, for the people of Nazareth to accept Jesus's divinity. How could he be anointed by God when they know his parents and siblings? How could he be anything other than the carpenter they know, despite the evidence? He was amazed at their unbelief, and it must have saddened him greatly.

Cont.



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And the people were angry. They heard that he healed the sick, but he tells them his message is for the poor, the blind, and the oppressed. The ones who come to Jesus for healing believe that he will provide restoration of their life. Those in his hometown can't move past who they thought he was to know him in this new way. They cannot ask for healing from Jesus as an act of faith in their God.

Moreover, the examples he gives them are of great prophets who reached beyond their people to feed and heal Gentiles. Jesus is telling them that their familiarity with him and his childhood does not grant them special access. Even today, our presumption can be a stumbling block that prevents us from understanding the true and generous nature of God's message. The false idea that we are part of an 'in-crowd' can distort our faith in Christ and separate us from those who are oppressed, blind, and sick – the very people that Jesus tells us over and over again to love and serve.

For some who consider themselves as part of an 'in-crowd,' this is a passage of judgment. (If it makes us uncomfortable, then we should read it again and again.) For those on the margins, this is a passage of promise and grace.

Jesus teaches us to seek those who are unwelcome and welcome them, to serve those in need rather than judge them for their need, and meet those who are sick and bring the whole community's love into our prayers for their healing. We are to place ourselves on the side of those who are oppressed and seek justice. When we do these things, Jesus promises to meet us, and isn't that what we, as Christians, are ultimately seeking – to meet and know Jesus?

Prayer or Thought of the Day

Lord, help me move a step back and take in the broader picture of your grace and love so that I may understand your Kingdom more clearly. Help me not to presume that as your disciple, I fully grasp how much you love all people, particularly those we have shut out, because your love and grace are more expansive than we can comprehend, and your promises are for everyone. Walk with me, Jesus, so that I may come to you in faith. Amen.

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