

The Day Jesus Said Too Much
Luke 4:22-30

A very shy young man from the farm finally asked the young lady from the next farm, “Sally Sue, will you marry me?” Without hesitation, she said, “Yes.” And then, silence. Long silence. Finally Sally Sue says, “Aren’t you going to say anything.”

He replied, “I think I’ve said too much already.” Because having said what he said, he knew his life would go in a new direction, would never again be the same.

Today, Jesus says too much. He says more than the faith of his family and neighbors in Nazareth can handle. And so it is that from the beginning Jesus is pushing us, pushing us to go further than we are comfortable in going, in living in response to God.

Remember last week? The passage right before this? Jesus is a rock star. He’s a hero. Everyone loves him. Speaks well of him. Because he has brought the words of the prophet Isaiah to life: He says, and I paraphrase, “Folks, God loves people like you, people who have been oppressed by Roman authorities and sin and poverty. God loves you. God gives you a new future.”

And they are overwhelmed by this message of comfort and hope. And Jesus says, in me, God’s promises begin to be fulfilled. And if Jesus had simply sat down, then gone home to the humble house in which he had most likely spent his childhood, then he would have remained the most popular man in Nazareth that day.

But instead, Jesus says too much. And we are astounded at how quickly and vehemently the crowd, the religious crowd, turns against Jesus.

So, here's what happens.

Jesus sits down, and all speak well of him.

But then, some doubt creeps in. "Wait a minute! Isn't this Joseph's son? Joseph wasn't all that great, and do you think his son is really the Chosen one by God?" These words are not in Scripture, but we can infer them, because suddenly the crowd is no longer speaking well of him, no longer mesmerized by his gracious words. We infer that the crowd now wants some more proof that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's mercy.

And at this point Jesus says too much. He engages the crowd, not with more merciful words, not with more promises, but challenges them. "Doubtless you have heard the proverb, physician, cure yourself." In other words, if a doctor is a real doctor, he should at least be able to cure his own disease. . . . And so by implication, Jesus knows the crowd is waiting for Jesus to back up his words with action.

But haven't you ever noticed that eventually we have to accept the power of Jesus Christ over our lives by faith? That is, if we demand proof and more proof, then we never really get around to following Jesus? I wonder if a little bit of this is going on in Nazareth today.

So Jesus says, I know, I know, you want to see some miracles here, similar to the ones I performed in Capernaum. Now, Luke has not told us what these miracles and such were, but no matter. And Jesus says, and I paraphrase again, "I know what you're thinking: Hey, Jesus, we are your hometown boys, your hometown girls. We have a special claim on your love, on your mercy, on your ministry, on your miracles."

And Jesus says too much because he says, that's not the case at all. Jesus' vision is greater than our own.

We want Jesus for ourselves. We want mercy for ourselves and judgment upon others. We want

forgiveness for ourselves and punishment upon others. And Jesus says too much because he implies God is not like that.

He quotes a proverb: no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. The modern expression is that an expert is someone who lives over 100 miles away, and I guess it was like that then, as well.

But then Jesus really says too much when he decides to tell a story from the Bible. Like the folks in Nazareth, we sometimes don't like it when the Bible says what we do not want it to say. And the story Jesus tells is something like this:

He says, "Speaking of prophets, and your wanting all my power for yourselves, remember back when Elijah was around. And there was a great drought? Many folks were suffering, including many faithful widows, folks who were good believers, worthy recipients." "But," Jesus says, "do you remember what happened?"

"Elijah was sent to none of the proper folks, none of the in-crowd, to quote a sixties expression, but rather, Elijah was sent to someone who lived off. A widow who lived up in Sidon. Oh, and while we're on the subject, remember when Israel was threatened by Assyria and there was a sort of tense peace treaty between the two nations. And there were many lepers in Israel, who needed to be cured, but it was God's grace that was given instead to a non-believing foreign General, by the name of Naaman."

Well, Jesus had said far too much. *About God's grace being for others, not just for ourselves. Jesus had said far too much.* He had pushed the congregation far beyond where it wanted to be spiritually.

And so, instead of savoring his words, wrestling with his words, instead of searching their own hearts, instead they are filled with rage at Jesus. A mob forms, they come after him, drive him to the top of the hill. Luke implies they were going to throw him off the hill, throw him out of town and if he dies in the fall so much the better. But then Luke implies that, maybe even by miracle, Jesus makes his way

through the crowd, out of the village, and back down to Capernaum.

So, where does the story leave us? It leaves us perhaps with wrestling again when Jesus says too much to us. When his words lead us far beyond where we want to be spiritually. It was good people, religious people in Nazareth that day. . . who became enraged at Jesus, simply because Jesus' implied that God's love and grace were not just for them, but for others as well.

I want to close with two convenience store/pastor stories. One true, the second a parable.

True story. I was minding my own business, filling my car with gasoline, when another car pulls up. It's a pastor from another church. "How's it going?" "Fine." Then he says, apropos of nothing, "Well, that's something what happened in Haiti. But God has a reason, because God doesn't make mistakes. I told my congregation tonight we need to stop worrying about Haiti and I told them we need to be praying for America." [As if we can't both pray for America and help others, but no matter.]

Then I said, "I cannot bring myself to believe in a God who would willingly inflict such suffering on people, and besides, I thought Jesus told us to go into all the world." He replied, "But Haiti has obviously committed unspeakable sins, for this to happen. Just like Sodom and Gomorrah."

And I became, shall we say. . . cranky, and said, "Well, hasn't every nation committed unspeakable sins? Slavery wasn't our finest hour, and we didn't get destroyed. And besides, in Sodom and Gomorrah, the sin was clearly stated, and many warnings were given. I just don't believe that the reason for natural calamities is God's vengeance."

Fortunately, by then both of our tanks were filled, so a holy war was averted at the Trade Wilco Hess at the foot of the Morehead City Bridge. But folks, I'm tired of it. I'm tired of accepting doctrines that deny the grace of Jesus Christ. Doctrines that imply mercy and help for us and demand judgment and vengeance upon others.

I mean, it's a great big Bible we have. With many stories. Why do we have to go always to the bloodiest ones, such as Sodom and Gomorrah? Why can't we read about Jesus sometimes? How he said as we offer help to the least of these, we offer help to Jesus himself?

Why can't we take to heart what it means, in Luke 9:51, for Jesus to chastise his disciples who wanted fire to rain down on a village that rejected Jesus? Why can't we take to heart what Paul says that while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us upon the cross?

We have to decide what our faith is: did Jesus come to pronounce a death sentence upon sinners or to offer them forgiveness, new life, new beginnings? Does Jesus call the church to pronounce God's wrath in every calamity, or to gear up to show forth God's gracious love to broken, shattered people?

The folks of Nazareth loved Jesus. Right up to the time when he implied God's grace was not just for them, but for the folks in Capernaum as well. And it was then Jesus said too much. *As if there's not enough grace to go around. But folks there is enough grace for all.*

Now the second pastor-convenience store story. A parable. . . Now a parable is true; it's just that it doesn't happen in history.

There was once a pastor who was in a big hurry, but had to stop to get five dollars worth of gasoline, just enough to make it to his next appointment. He goes into the convenience store, and finds himself behind two people who spoke only Spanish. And they were trying to make some point or another to the cashier, and it wasn't working. And so it went on and one, the pastor becoming later and later, his frustration boiling.

"Why can't these people learn our language?" (By the way the Native Americans must have asked the same thing when we came to their shores, but never mind) "Are these people even here legally?" These thoughts boiled within him.

And then, he said, Jesus spoke to him. Said too much for the pastor to hold on to his old attitude. And maybe it wasn't Jesus exactly who spoke, but it was perhaps the spirit of Jesus, somewhere from deep inside himself, which said, "Pastor, why don't you learn Spanish so you could help folks like this? For I love you, but I love them just as much as I love you."

When Jesus says too much to us, we have a choice: either to become enraged, as the folks in Nazareth did. Or, we can choose to listen. Amen.

Benediction: "And now may the grace, the mercy, the love, and the life of Jesus Christ be with you and your enemies now and always. Amen"