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“Amazed and Confused”

Jeremiah 4:1-10 Luke 4:21-30 I Corinthians 13:1-13

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 4:21-30

Last Sunday we looked at Jesus first sermon in his adopted hometown of Nazareth. That was part 1. This morning we look at, as Paul Harvey used to say, “the rest of the story.” Let us look at the reaction to that sermon. Jesus’ first recorded miracle was changing water into wine at a wedding. Jesus first sermon changed a homecoming into a mob. If you thought last Sunday’s text was a cliff hanger.... Hear the word of the Lord from the gospel of Luke 4:21-30.

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The first movie that Matthew McConaughey was in was called “Dazed and Confused.” The movie took its title from a song by Led Zeppelin. It was a 1993 American coming-of-age comedy film written and directed by Richard Linklater. The film featured a large ensemble cast of actors who would later become stars, including Ben Affleck and Matthew McConaughey. The plot follows various groups of Texas teenagers during the last day of school in 1976.

I’m thinking that sometime later tonight there will be some Athletes that will be Dazed and Confused. (I won’t say who I will be rooting for, but the mascot of my alma mater, Waltrip High School was the Rams.)

On a Saturday morning, in Nazareth, the town gathered in the synagogue to listen to Jesus read and teach. They were AMAZED and CONFUSED.

Having Jesus speak was no big surprise. He was well known in the area; it was his adopted hometown. He was raised there. So when he read from the Isaiah scroll, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor,” everyone understood these words to be the words of Isaiah. It is how that prophet from long ago defined his ministry. When Jesus finished that reading he handed the scroll to the attendant and sat down.

Today preachers stand in a pulpit ... but in Jesus’ day you sat in the Moses’ Seat to teach the people. So this morning I’m going to preach like Jesus did.

When Jesus sat down to preach, all eyes were on him. What would he say about this great prophet Isaiah? Would he emphasize the bad news that Israel had sinned and would be taken into captivity by the Babylonians? Would he emphasize the good news that one day God would restore his people and bring them back from captivity?

Jesus does neither. That’s the thing that catches everyone off guard. He doesn’t emphasize those things from the past. He focused on the present. He doesn’t lift up Isaiah as the great role model; Jesus lifts up himself. This is what upsets everybody at the synagogue. He dared to say that these great words of Isaiah were really about himself. “Today,” he said, “this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Based on verse 22, it appears there was immediately a double-reaction: some were amazed and part of their amazement at his "gracious" speech gets expressed in the line "Isn't this Joseph's son?" But that question seems to cut two ways, and Jesus' subsequent words indicate his awareness of this.

The question "Isn't this Joseph's son" CAN be a source of genuine wonder and appreciation—AMAZED--look how far our local boy has come! Perhaps some of the older men were thinking, "I remember when he was just a little boy hanging around his father's shop. Where did he learn to talk like that?"

But it's not difficult to see that the same question could be asked with a real edge to it, with a sneer, with derision, CONFUSED-- "Joseph and Mary's kid? Good grief. He was a nobody back in the day and he's a nobody from a no-account family now. Just who does he think he is?" 1

Jesus perceived that his adopted hometown audience they wanted to see more than just hear that he was a fulfillment of one of Isaiah's prophecies. Jesus goes on to suggest that maybe those very detractors in the crowd that day would be asking him shortly for an authenticating sign. Although we have not as of yet been told directly by Luke of any particular work Jesus did in Capernaum, apparently he's been there and done some amazing things. He sensed that they wanted to see some fireworks, some miracles like they had heard he was doing over in Capernaum. Maybe they ESPECIALLY wanted to see him do that 120 gallon miracle they had heard about at that wedding in Cana!

Jesus 9 word sermon clearly denotes the kind of ministry he came to pursue. It is to be a ministry to the poor and outcast. Jesus also sensed what the people were thinking about his announcement so he extended his sermon a little more. He quoted a popular proverb of the day, "Physician, heal yourself." Then he said what they were thinking, "No doubt some of you are thinking, why doesn't he do here at home what we heard he has done elsewhere? Jesus concluded sadly, "No prophet is accepted in his hometown."

In verses 24 through 27, Jesus referred to certain events in Jewish history that his audience knew about but nobody talked about much. Jesus told of two occasions when God sent his prophets Elijah and Elisha on missions of mercy to the Jewish people but they were rejected. God then sent those prophets to the non-Jews, the Gentiles, to bring spiritual and physical healing. That was not good news to the good Jews of Nazareth. The Jews assumed that they as descendents of Abraham were God's favorites and that non-Jews were trash. Jesus challenged that myth. He indicted them for lack of faith and racial prejudice and that because of the attitudes some were harboring in their hearts at that very moment, the Nazareth populace was not worthy of a divine working. Instead, as in the days of Elijah and Elisha, God would work his wonders elsewhere, outside Israel. 2

That's part of what made the Nazareth folks so angry with Jesus. He dared to trample on the myth that their race and nationality gave them most favored nation status with God.

Much of Jesus' healing power is a mystery to us, but we do know that it increased when faith was present. In Mark's account of Jesus' first sermon he writes that Jesus could not perform many miracles there, and was amazed by the lack of faith. (Mark 6:5) In order for Jesus to heal them, He had to expose their sins, their prejudices, and their myths. People who challenge our cherished myths and force us out of our comfort zones are not well received. The truth is that when Jesus sets about the task of saving us, he has to heal us of any myth or prejudice that is contrary to his spirit. Jesus told them the hard, unvarnished truth. Yet, when the truth brought a hostile reaction Jesus didn't retaliate. He walked away.

*A good illustration of Christ-like reaction in the face of rejection is seen in the life of Abraham Lincoln that I mentioned last Sunday. From Lincoln's earliest days in politics, Lincoln had a critic who continually treated him with contempt. The man was Edwin Stanton. Stanton would say to newspaper reporters that Lincoln was a "low cunning clown" and "the original gorilla." He said it was ridiculous for explorers to go to Africa to capture a gorilla "when they could find one easily in Springfield, Illinois."*

*Lincoln never responded to such slander; he never retaliated in the least. And when, as President, he needed a Secretary of War, he selected Edwin Stanton. When his friends asked why, Lincoln replied, "Because he is the best man for the job."*

*Years later, that fateful night came when an assassin's bullet murdered the president in a theater. Lincoln's body was carried off to another room. Stanton came, and looking down upon the silent, rugged, face of his dead President, he said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." Stanton's animosity had finally been broken by Lincoln's patient, long-suffering, non-retaliatory love. 3*

Jesus didn't retaliate. However, he didn't return. We have no indication that he ever returned to Nazareth for the rest of his ministry. From then on he was a man without a home or a hometown.

They wanted Jesus to forgive and save them, but not to change them, especially if the changes hurt. They were like the little boy whose bedtime prayer sounded like this, "Dear Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am."

This week I shared a cartoon on my Facebook page that featured a pastor at a table surrounded by what looks like a committee. (Surely it was not a "Call Committee." like we commissioned this morning.) The caption read, "We are hoping that you will lead us on a transformational journey without requiring and real changes." Or as one of my favorite jokes goes-- How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb?  
CHANGE?

Ruby Bridges was a six-year-old girl, who was the first person to integrate the schools in New Orleans. Every day the federal marshals escorted her into the schoolhouse because both sides of the sidewalk would be lined with people who were screaming threats. Robert Coles, a noted Harvard psychiatrist, volunteered his time to work with young Ruby. Every day he would talk with her, trying to help her weather the crisis. On

the news one night, he noticed her walking up the sidewalk and the people were screaming and throwing things, but suddenly she stopped and said something and started backing down the sidewalk. Then the marshals picked her up and took her into the building. That night, Cole asked her what she said to the marshals. She said, "I was not talking to the marshals." He said, "Yes, you were. I saw you on the news. I saw your lips moving. You were talking to the marshals." She said, "I was not talking to the marshals." He said, "Well, what were you doing?" She said, "I was praying for those people who were hollering at me. I had forgotten to pray and I was trying to go back and pray for them as I walked to the school building." Cole shook his head and said, "You were praying for the people who were screaming at you?" She said, "Yes, my mama taught me that when people speak mean of you, you pray for them just like Jesus prayed for the people who spoke mean of him." 4

No doubt some spoke mean of him when they screamed and cursed at Jesus as they took him to the cliff. Perhaps some spat on him. But nobody had the nerve to stop him from leaving. Jesus' just walked right through them and left Nazareth for good. His time had not yet come. His ministry was not over. In fact, he was just getting started. What was over, however, was the chance for his words to be heard in his adopted hometown.

As I said last week, Jesus is now in his original hometown of heaven, one that has room for Elijah AND the widow of Zarepath and for Elisha AND Naaman, and for all the people of the world who have answered the call to follow Jesus.

We marvel at Jesus' ability to take rejection from those he knew well. We pray that as we seek to follow him that we will not let rejection deter us from sharing his love with others. We pray that we would go forth undaunted even in the face of rejection, for the sake of those who will be receptive. We place our success in God's care, and vow to continue and to continue knowing that every seed planted will produce fruit in due season. We pray that we will take up Jesus' call to bring good news to the poor, release to the captive, freedom to the oppressed and sight to the blind.

*A young boy of 9 was sitting in his father's workshop watching his dad work on a harness. "Someday Father," said Louis, "I want to be a harness-maker, just like you." "Why not start now?" said the father. He took a piece of leather and drew a design on it. "Now" he said, "take the hole-punch and hammer out this design, but be careful that you don't hit your hand." Excited, the boy began to work, but when he hit the hole-punch, it flew out of his hand and pierced his eye! He lost his sight in that eye. Later, as fate would have it, sight in the other eye failed. Louis was now totally blind.*

*A few years later, Louis was sitting in the family garden when a friend handed him a pinecone. As he ran his sensitive fingers over the cone, an idea came to him. He became enthusiastic and began to create an alphabet of raised dots on paper so that the blind could feel and interpret. Thus, Louis Braille in 1818 opened up a whole new world for the blind. 5*

That is what Jesus announced he wanted to do during his public ministry. He wanted to open up a whole new world for others and for us. Jesus wants to bring us out of our poverty that has long held us down and give us eyes to see the need around us. Jesus

wants us to not be hostile towards him, his message, ministry and mission like his adopted hometown was that Sabbath day... but to take up his calling as our own which of course involves much more than just being ... amazed and confused.

And the people said? Amen.

1. Comments and Observations, by Scott Hoezee
2. Comments and Observations, by Scott Hoezee
3. How Is Your Love Life? by Dale Johnson
4. Sermons for Sundays in Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany: Building a Victorious Life, by Gary L. Carver
5. ChristianGlobe Illustrations, by Brett Blair