

## **Luke 4:21-30**

<sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” <sup>22</sup>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?” <sup>23</sup>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.’” <sup>24</sup>And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. <sup>25</sup>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; <sup>26</sup>yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. <sup>27</sup>There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” <sup>28</sup>When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

## **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup>It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup>Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup>For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup>but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup>And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

## Sermon – Sun Feb 3, 2019

There was once an evangelist named Billy Sunday. He was the Billy Graham of his generation. He was conducting a crusade in a particular city, and in one sermon he said something critical of labour conditions for workers in that city. After the service, several businessmen sent him a message which read as follows:

**“Billy, leave labour matters alone. Concentrate on getting people saved. Stay away from political issues. You’re rubbing the fur the wrong way”.**

Billy Sunday sent this message back to them:

**“If I’m rubbing the fur the wrong way, tell the cats to turn around”.**

**Jesus was rubbing the fur the wrong way in Nazareth in today’s Gospel.**

Basically he was telling them to turn around, to change perspective.

We are still in the season of Epiphany – the season of revelations about who God is. So what is our Lord revealing to us today? I think two things.

First is that God’s Grace, God’s mercy, God’s favour is for **all**, Jews and Gentiles and beyond.

The second thing revealed is that our Lord Jesus is unafraid of confrontation and challenging people. He stirs the pot in this week’s Gospel, knowing people will not like it. He never told people what they wanted to hear. He told them the truth

So what happened? Last week Jesus stood up in the synagogue and read from the scroll of Isaiah. The people seemed to love it - Good News to the poor, sight to the blind, release to the captives and the oppressed going free. Jesus implies he will make Isaiah’s prophecy come true and the people were pleased. The scripture says “...<sup>22</sup>All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.”

But Jesus knows what else they are thinking. They are thinking maybe he will do some of the wonders in his hometown that they heard he had done in Capernaum where there were many Gentiles. Why would he not do the same for them? After all, he’s one of them! Jesus’ point: They are not to look after just themselves. The law says that the Jews are to **share** the riches of God’s grace with the gentiles, that is what the law really requires. They are not doing that in Nazareth, so they don’t see the wonders that Capernaum saw.

What gets people so angry? Just a couple of illustrations Jesus brings up, from their own scriptures.

Jesus mentions two events in the lives of the great prophet Elijah and his disciple and protégé Elisha. First Elijah. Israel went through a three-and-a-half year drought which produced a severe famine. There were many widows as a result, but the prophet Elijah was sent to help just one of them, an outsider, a Gentile, a widow at Zarephath in Sidon,. That gets the good folk in Nazareth hot under the collar.

Then Jesus mentions Elisha, disciple of and spiritual successor of Elijah. He lived in a day, in which lepers roamed in large numbers. Only one of them was cleansed, Naaman the Syrian and again a Gentile, an outsider. These stories are so well-known to them. They realized Jesus' point: The law says the Jews are to **share** the riches of God's grace with the gentiles. They knew that to be true, an unpleasant truth for them and that may be why their hostile reaction is so intense. They wanted to throw Jesus off the cliff

Fred Craddock, a famous preacher once said:

“Anger and violence are the last defense of those who are made to face the truth embedded in their own tradition. “1

“Such truths will not go away even after the one who pointed to them has been removed.”

Martin Luther King Day was just celebrated in the US on January 15. Did the civil rights movement die when he was assassinated in Memphis that terrible April day in 1968? No. Did the emancipation of the slaves go away when the shot was fired, killing Abraham Lincoln in 1865? No. Did the Good News die when Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross two-thousand years ago? No.

Truth cannot be stifled, even if the truth-teller is removed from the scene.

The immediate reaction of the people in the Nazareth synagogue to Jesus' explosive words is to get rid of him. But the issue will not go away, even if they drive him off the cliff. They don't want to hear the truth, but the truth is the truth anyway.

And the truth of Jesus' message is that God's overwhelming grace is meant to be given freely to everybody, regardless of race or culture. God's umbrella of inclusion is much, much bigger than they will ever know.

Jesus makes it clear that his message is to be taken to all people everywhere, and not just to the chosen few. This is not a new word Jesus is bringing to Nazareth. By citing the two stories from the Old Testament, he is telling them that this has always been God's method of operation. It has always been God's desire that all people, regardless of language or culture, come into his kingdom. As one commentator puts it, God is not...

“a local deity enshrined in some grotto down the street. God's saving power is bigger than one town can hold, God's mercy is wider than any one village can imagine.”<sup>2</sup>

God's grace extends far beyond the reaches of any one convention of people, and those who would exclude others from sharing in God's eternal riches just may find themselves to be out when they think they are in.

So where does that leave us today? This morning we heard the powerful epistle from 1 Corinthians about love...there is faith, there is hope, but the greatest of these is love. That is the foundation of God's inclusive grace...it is love. Not necessarily an easy love, but a love that is patient, kind, neither envious, boastful, arrogant, nor rude. A love that does not insist on its own way, is not irritable nor resentful. Love that does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

And how do we at St James include better, love better? What truth might our Lord mention to us if he were here this morning, ready to stir the pot? Amen.