

### **Jeremiah 1:4-10**

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

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

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 of 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.

## Sermon

Can you imagine it. Word had spread from Capernaum and beyond that Jesus was a rock star! He was wise about scripture and inspirational in his message, but most importantly he followed his words with acts of power - deeds of restoration and miracles of healing. And the hometown hero was returning. The word carried throughout the town and the countryside all around.

The synagogue was packed in and Jesus didn't let them down, his message was one of hope. The scroll of Isaiah was a word of hope, not only for the exiles who originally heard it, but for those neighbors gathered in Nazareth who were struggling with the oppression of Roman occupation. This was good news, and to state that it was fulfilled in that moment, in their very presence, can you imagine the anticipation. They had to be lining up to receive their healing, calling out for their restoration, and seeking to join up with whatever rebellion he might be leading to gain freedom from the oppression of Rome.

He heard their cries for a miracle and stepped back to remind them of the prophets Elisha and Elijah. "Remember that they came when there was need in Israel, but they didn't their acts with gentiles." Now this wasn't going to win over the crowd. Jesus was telling the people that the mighty deeds that he had done before would not happen in Nazareth. And the people turned on him, kicked him out of his own town, and almost killed him there and then, "You said that the prophecy was fulfilled yet where is our good news, where is our release from captivity, where is our freedom from oppression." Your words are empty, and so they are lies.

Let's talk a minute about privilege and about expectations. Privilege is a special right, advantage, or immunity granted a person or group of people. The neighbors of Nazareth believed they had a privilege of "knowing" Jesus. "Isn't that Joseph's son?" They believed they had an inside track to the rock star, a back stage pass. If he healed those strangers, then I can't wait to see what he does for me, I was his neighbor two houses down.

Have you ever stopped to think about your own privilege? I have mine. I am a white, anglosaxon, male living in the Midwest with a wife and a live-in mother-in-law who watches the children. We have two incomes, two cars, a house, and plenty of food and access to doctors and healthcare services. I am a pastor and so seen with some authority and as a professional. I am highly educated, having a masters and working on a doctorate. I have so much privilege yet so much of my life is spent not noticing it, yet still expecting things to work my way, to be done the way I would have them done.

I wonder about the privilege of the people of Nazareth, expecting miracles because they were Jesus neighbors, because they new him and his father. I wonder about the power of privilege that lead them to expect Jesus to do for them what he had done for others. And I wonder how much my own privilege might lead me to apathy and false expectations.

Maybe you are like me and at times you wonder where God is. In the midst of struggle or conflict you wonder why God hasn't fixed everything. Why has God not made it all better. Don't I believe enough, don't I worship enough, aren't I a friend of Jesus?

Jesus walked away from this first cliff, but his story is still an image of what was yet to come. His home town rejected him, just as his own people would reject him in the end. The people wanted him to die for what he said, and eventually it would catch up to him on the cross. He proclaimed the year of acceptance, yet he found no acceptance himself.

And I think that is what happens when Jesus holds up the mirror for us, points out our own privilege and challenges us to grow and to rely on God's grace alone. We so want to only rely on ourselves, on our own hard work and our own strengths. We so want to make our own grace. But Jesus says, not so fast. Things don't always work the way you would want them to work.

Jesus used the prophets Elisha and Elijah and I think he must have used them purposefully. He reminded the people that these prophets helped the gentiles instead of the Israelites. But I believe that Jesus knew the story and that the people did too. Because their stories did come back around, and the people of Israel eventually received their strength and renewal as well. And so do we.

God's plan is at work, Jesus' authority is sure, and his healing power touches us all - not because we have earned it, but because God is willing to give it to us still - in love and grace. Thanks be to God for challenging us to grow in faith.