

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, February 2, 2025 based on 1 Corinthians 13 and Luke 4:21-30. Jesus Kingdom is for All!

Today in our lessons, we have the call of the boy prophet, Jeremiah, the love chapter in 1st Corinthians 13, and Jesus getting tossed out of his hometown for preaching the good news of the kingdom of God in Luke chapter 4.

First, in our second reading from 1st Corinthians, known as the love chapter, often associated with weddings, the Apostle Paul tells the church that the kind of love they should form their community around is "agape" in the original Greek. This type of love is patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it's not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

I think to myself, who can love like this? Is your love for your spouse or family or church always patient, kind, never arrogant or rude? Do you never insist on your own way? Sadly, most, if not all of us, don't operate with this kind of love in our relationships. But that is the ideal of how we should treat one another as Christians. Our relationships break down when we insist on our own way or become rude or irritable with one another. Love is often transactional or falls under the category of "what have you done for me lately".

But Agape is the love that God showed us first in Jesus Christ. It is God's expansive and excessive love for all people and all creation... simply because God created them. It's God's love for us found on the cross. You don't have to earn God's love, or be in the right blood line, or have worldly success, or amazing piety. It is John 3:16 love. For God so loved the world... God loved the whole cosmos **as is** and sent Jesus into this world to demonstrate that love. Christ didn't wait for us to be perfect before he came. He came while we were still sinners says Romans. The Apostle Paul appeals to agape love in his letter to the church in Corinth. He wants the community to live out this love with each other and the world around them. The church people were divided in Corinth, Jews and Gentiles, Slaves and Free, and had loyalties to different preachers and different eating habits. They created a hierarchy as to who had better spiritual gifts like speaking in

tongues, prophecy, faith, and generosity. But Paul says, you can have these amazing spiritual gifts, but if they aren't active in love for the neighbor, they are useless.

That love for all is what Jesus preaches when he goes to his hometown of Nazareth, to the local synagogue. And as we find out, they didn't like it. Prior to this, according to Luke, Jesus did some pretty amazing things in Capernaum, perhaps miracles, healings, exorcisms. People heard about it. But Capernaum was primarily in Gentile territory. Jesus was Jewish, of course. This will pose a problem for the nativists.

When Jesus arrived in Nazareth, his popularity had grown. But Jesus didn't care about popularity. Popularity was never a source of validation for him.

Remember from last week in church, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah and said, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing... that in him, he has brought salvation to the broken hearted, the economically disadvantaged, the suppressed, the imprisoned, and the disabled. All spoke well of him at first.

Someone in the crowd said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" They could not accept the fact that the local boy, Joe's son, was the anointed Son of God. Their minds were made up about Jesus because of his family background and upbringing.

Jesus, then said to them, 'no doubt you will quote these two proverbs to me "Doctor, cure yourself!" and "no prophet is accepted in his hometown." I have wrestled with the meaning of Doctor, cure yourself all week. But I think I am starting to understand it. It was a proverb that meant people should take care of their own faults first and not just correct the faults of others.

Like Aesop's fable, the Frog and the Fox. A frog leaves his native swamp and proclaims himself a wonder-working doctor. He is then asked by a skeptical fox how is it that you can cure others but you cannot cure your own lameness and sickly green complexion?

But to apply the proverb here to Luke, "It will take more than words to convince us. If you're truly the Messiah, prove it by working a

miracle or doing something else equally messianic like you did in Capernaum.” The doctor in the proverb should heal *himself*; that is, he should practice his medicine *at home*. In the same way, Jesus should display His power at home, in Nazareth, and not just in other places where Gentiles live. But Jesus doesn’t have a hometown bias. He came for all people.

Jesus then appeals to the Hebrew Scriptures and reminds them that two of the greatest Jewish prophets Elijah and Elisha were sent to help foreigners. Elijah was sent to a widow at Zaraphath in Sidon and Elisha healed a foreigner of Leprosy, Naaman the Syrian. Once the locals heard this, scriptures they would have been familiar with, they were filled with rage. They drove Jesus to top of a hill in order to throw him off the cliff and stone him... like they did to false prophets. But Jesus did finally work a miracle. He passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

What does this say to us today? We cannot box Jesus into our definitions or expectations of what we think he should be. I once heard, If we draw a line between ourselves and others else based on our own prejudices, Jesus is always on the other side of the line seeking justice and a leveling playing field. In this story, Jesus didn’t care about popularity for validation. He didn’t have a hometown bias, and he wasn’t afraid to speak the truth in love to members of his childhood faith to remind them that God’s grace and love is for all.

Amen