

PHYSICIAN, HEAL YOURSELF

I was reminded recently of a surprisingly intense fight between 2 of our kids.

One of them had pushed another over into a laundry hamper because they INSISTED that the blanket they were playing around with was yellow while the other claimed it was brown.

The pain and injustice of being pushed over like that was only magnified by the fact that the blanket was in fact yellow.

I don't know why they thought it was brown, or why they would care so much as to have that violent of a reaction.

I just remember thinking - there's a sermon illustration in this somewhere!

I mean, it's a ridiculous situation, right? But don't we behave like this way more often than we should? We get all worked up and angry about relatively trivial things...and that only amplifies as the truths being contested get more serious and close to the heart.

Over these next several weeks, we're going to be reflecting on what it looks like to find and live out peace and hope in the midst of a particular source of anxiety: Politics, in the midst of an election year.

2 things I want to point out at the outset:

- This series is not about telling you how to vote. It's not that I believe our faith is unrelated to the ballot box. BUT the reality is that issues and candidates are often complex, and there can be a lot of faithful reasons for people to come to completely different conclusions on who or what to vote for.
- So instead, this series is primarily about WHO God is, and how we as believers can navigate the reality of politics in a way that witnesses to Lordship of Jesus no matter the current circumstances of our country.

So with that, let's get back to our scripture text in Luke 4. Much like my kids, we see the people of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, become enraged by a message he gives in the synagogue and try to throw him off of a cliff.

What could have possibly set them off like this?

Let's walk through the text that Rudy just read for us, because there are some bits that are a bit lost on us due to cultural differences over time.

CONTEXT: Jesus has been traveling around Galilee teaching and preaching, generally received very well. Luke doesn't tell us this yet, but the other Gospel writers summarize his message as "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near" and that he evidenced this with his miracles.

Luke tells us that he arrives in Nazareth and is invited to speak at the synagogue. This is significant. He's in his hometown and they honor him by letting him step in as the guest speaker.

MESSAGE OF HOPE: It is unclear whether he selected this scroll from Isaiah or if it was simply the selected text for the day, but the message is a particularly hopeful one:

Good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed, the year of the Lord's favor.

This is a hope that is physical, spiritual, economic, and political.

Easy for us to overlook the political significance when and if we are living in times when our liberty and flourishing are relatively unimproved by the government. I doubt this message would have seemed as significant if Rome were doing even a mediocre job caring for Nazareth.

The Jewish people as a whole are struggling under Rome's occupation, and Nazareth in particular isn't faring particularly well.

They are longing for the day of REST and RELEASE the prophets spoke of when they would flourish under the FAVOR of God.

And Jesus says, this is fulfilled in your hearing! The time is now.

HEAL YOURSELF: Here's where it gets confusing, because things go downhill. We should note in the text that the people have nothing but *positive* things to say about Jesus at this point. Even the comment "Isn't this Joseph's son?" isn't meant to imply doubt but astonishment.

There's a bit of confusion over this next bit because of what we tend to read into the text.

We read that bit as if people are looking down their nose with skepticism at Jesus because 'he's their hometown boy' - they remember wiping his boogers - and now he's claiming to be able to do miracles? Prove it, Jesus!

That's how we often interpret the proverb mentioned, "Doctor, heal yourself!" - As if Jesus is saying they doubt his ability or his identity as Messiah.

But that's NOT how that saying was used by people at the time. An article by *Dr. Monique Cuany* examines 8 instances of where a doctor in need of healing is used metaphorically.

In one example - a poet named Ovid gives advice for getting rejected by a woman, noting that he's endured the pain himself but that this is what worked for him. He calls himself a *shamefully sick physician*... but it helped to remind himself of her faults (bad podcast advice). But the point here is that he's saying "isn't it ironic that a physician would be sick? But at least he knows what to do"

Likewise, a Greek philosopher named Plutarch often used the phrase, "Doctor of others, full of sores himself" - criticizing the hypocrisy of those who "diagnose" what is wrong with others but seem blind to the fact that they do the same things. [*This calls to mind Jesus' quippy saying, "don't call out the speck in your brother's eye when you have a plank in your own"*]

A final significant comparison comes from another Greek philosopher, Dio Chrysostom. Here, he's making an argument for why philosophers should be willing to use their skills to serve their cities in public office. He says that being unwilling to do so would be like a doctor refusing to heal his own body. So here the doctor's body isn't his own but the welfare of his community.

In all of them, the common characteristics are that (1) it's ironic that a doctor should be sick, (2) the doctor actually has a track record of healing, (3) the doctor has helped others, and yet (4) the doctor (or his kinsman) are found in want of healing.

What's significant is that NONE of the examples question the ability of the doctor. They assume the doctor CAN do something about the sickness and ought to take their own advice.

Understanding that actually makes much more sense out of what follows.

They aren't looking down their nose at Jesus skeptically. They're wondering why he hasn't used his abilities to help them out.

Isn't this Joseph's kid? Isn't he one of us? Why is he only just now getting here?

JLo - "Jenny from the block"? Biden - from Pittsburgh, supposedly has blue collar workers in mind. *We chaff at people who claim to identify with us and yet we suspect that they have forgotten us*

Jesus picks up on it and says, "You'd be right to quote to me the proverb - 'Physician, heal yourself.' 'Do for us what you've done in Capernaum!'"

FRICTION: So this hope of God's Favor has arrived, and they WANT it and Jesus WANTS it for them. But what he has to tell them next is hard, and just like the prophets were rejected by their own people, he knows that his hometown is unlikely to receive it.

He recalls 2 instances in Israel's history where there was great need, but Israel was so consumed with idolatry that they failed to recognize God as their source of help. Instead - while there were plenty of widows and lepers in Israel in need of help - it was 2 Gentiles who notably received miraculous care. And Israel would instead be sent into exile.

He's essentially saying that he WANTS to heal them and set them free, but that they are likely to miss it just like their ancestors missed it during the days of Elijah and Elisha.

The fact that Gentiles were the ones healed might have been irritating to those in the synagogue, but unlikely to be the reason they were so mad. They knew the stories.

But Jesus was implying that they were just as wayward as Israel was back then - so blind that Gentiles were the ones more likely to recognize God than they were. SO CONSUMED WITH SELF-INTEREST that they may miss out on the blessing entirely and be sent into exile.

They are SO mad that they chase him out of town and want to throw him off a cliff.

That's a pretty stark change of reception - from guest of honor to trying to kill him! I've had some bad sermons before, but none of them have gone quite that badly.

So what do we make of this?

A few weeks ago, I referenced a book by Curtis Chang called the Anxiety Opportunity. But I want to share another tidbit of wisdom this morning that Chang shares in a different book called *The After Party* - a project created alongside his friends Russell Moore and David French.

Reflecting on the way we engage as Christians in the political world, they share what they think are the two guiding principles for disciples: humility and hope. A disciple is humble, because we are learners... but we are also hopeful, because we believe in our teacher.

But we can also struggle with either of those qualities. And they map out what that looks like for us with a helpful grid.

When we are high in *humility*, but low in *hope*, we become exhausted. We know we don't know the answers, but honestly we're not sure anyone does, and we just feel overwhelmed.

This reminds me of the paralyzed man by the pool of Bethesda. Jesus asks him, "Do you want to be well?" He just says, "I have no one to help me get in the pool when the water is stirred."

(apparently some superstition about angels stirring the water and people being healed)

He can't do it on his own and has no hope of anyone helping. He can't even conceive that Jesus might want to help him.

When we're low in both *humility* and *hope*, we become cynical. We know we don't have the answers, but the one thing we're certain of is that there isn't any hope. I think of both Judas and Peter. Judas had apparently become disenchanted with Jesus and betrayed him for money. Peter said he'd go with Jesus to the end but ends up denying him 3 times. Both were humble enough to be disciples but lost their hope.

But these people in the synagogue, they're in the other category - High hope, low humility. They believe there's an answer to their problems, and they can win the fight. But they think they're side is right and everyone else is wrong, and to challenge that just makes them combative.

Their experience with Jesus should give us caution.

Many of us are pretty jaded when it comes to politics. But even being jaded means there was a hope or a standard that we sense has not been met.

It is APPROPRIATE that we should hope for good stewardship and care from governing authorities. Good that we should hope for justice, liberty, prosperity, and health.

The message here is NOT that we should expect less from those who govern us or be less critical of them or their claims.

But our anxiety over those things can tempt us to (1) fixate on our own needs, (2) minimize or rationalize our faults, and (3) build ourselves up by tearing down others.

And when we are challenged, we may get defensive and lash out - often feeling as if we are being righteous while doing so. Because WE are on the right side. God's side.

We are often HAPPY to acknowledge that we need and even deserve care.
We are not so happy to be told we need to change.

We are HAPPY to demand action to provide for us when the problem is OUT THERE.
We are not so happy when we are told the issue is IN HERE (our hearts, our community).

Over the next several weeks, we'll discuss many themes related to politics - discernment, engagement, expectations of those in authority, seeking common ground and common good, and more...

Today, I just want to challenge us to bring all of our hopes to Jesus with humility.

Jesus is God in flesh. The Great Physician. Our Messiah and Lord. Hope of the nations.
Good news to the poor. Liberator of the captives. The ONE we've been waiting for!

But to receive healing and hope means acknowledging our faults, repenting, and receiving him.
That can be an incredibly challenging thing to do.
The people of Nazareth are a poor example to follow. But perhaps there is a better one.

Read Psalm 139.

(1) Rooted in God's love (2) Identify with God (3) Recognize your weakness
May this be our prayer, and may we receive Jesus in repentance.