

Luke 4:21-30

²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked. ²³ Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

²⁴ “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy^[a] in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

THE EXPRESSION TO PUT SOMEONE IN A BOX CAN MEAN TO TRY TO FORCE THEM TO CONFORM TO OUR EXPECTATIONS.

THIS INCLUDES SEEKING TO DEFINE WHO THE PERSON OR GROUP IS OR IS NOT.

FAR TOO OFTEN, IF ONLY SUBCONSCIOUSLY WE DO THIS BY DEFINING OTHERS BY : RACE, NATIONALITY, ETHNIC GROUP, ECONOMIC STATUS, RELIGION, BEING URBAN OR COUNTRY OR SMALL-TOWN DWELLERS, ETC.

THE DANGER WITH PUTTING OTHERS INTO A BOX OF OUR CHOOSING IS THAT IT LIMITS OUR PERCEPTION OF THEM, AS WELL AS OUR ABILITY TO RELATE TO THEM AS INDIVIDUALS.

THE TRUTH IS- WHILE CERTAIN GROUPS MAY SHARE SOME CULTURAL OR OTHER CHARACTERISTICS, WE ARE NOT ALL ALIKE EVEN WITHIN OUR SOCIETAL CATEGORIES.

THIS FACT SHOULD INSPIRE US TO PAUSE BEFORE MAKING QUICK DETERMINATIONS ABOUT OTHERS.

AND WE SHOULD BE EVEN MORE CAUTIOUS IN HOW WE THINK ABOUT GOD, SINCE SOMETIMES WE TRY TO PUT GOD OR JESUS INTO A BOX, BECAUSE DOING SO ALLOWS US TO TRY TO DEFINE WHO GOD IS AND IS NOT.

HOWEVER, DOING THIS PUTS US VERY CLOSE TO THE LINE THAT CAN CAUSE US TO CROSS OVER TO SIN, BY TRYING TO DOMESTICATE THE LORD.

YOU SEE, PUTTING GOD INTO A BOX IMPLIES WE SEEK TO HAVE GOD CONFORM TO OUR WILLS INSTEAD OF US CONFORMING TO GOD’S WILL.

EARLY IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS GOD CLEARLY RESISTED ANY ATTEMPTS TO BE BOXED IN.

WHEN THE LORD APPEARED TO MOSES IN THE BURNING BUSH AND HE ASKED GOD FOR HIS NAME:

THE LORD REPLIED; “I AM WHO I AM”. IN OTHER WORDS, ONLY GOD CAN DEFINE GOD’S PERSON.

WHILE WE CAN LEARN MUCH ABOUT THE LORD AND GROW IN OUR PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE, GOD ALWAYS REMAINS BEYOND OUR CAPACITY TO FULLY UNDERSTAND.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE CONFLICT IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN NAZARETH, DESCRIBED IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING.

ITHT FINDS ITS ORIGIN IN JESUS REFUSING TO FIT INTO THE BOX OF HIS HOMETOWN NEIGHBOR'S CHOOSING.

LAST WEEK WE HEARD HE READ FROM ISAIAH 61, WHICH DESCRIBES SPEAKING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR, RELEASE OF THE CAPTIVES, AND SEVERAL OTHER PROMISES FROM GOD, WHICH JESUS SAID WERE FULFILLED IN THEIR HEARING.

THE COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF THAT TIME WOULD HAVE BEEN THAT JESUS WAS CLAIMING TO BE THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

AND HIS FELLOW JEWS ALREADY HAD A BOX PREPARED FOR WHO THE MESSIAH WOULD BE AND WHAT HE WOULD DO.

THE MESSIAH WOULD FREE THEM FROM ROMAN OPPRESSION, THUS ENABLING THEM TO WORSHIP GOD WITHOUT ANY FEAR OF OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE.

THE MESSIAH WOULD ALSO BE A KING FROM DAVID'S LINE AND WOULD REESTABLISH THE TRUE MONARCHY IN ISRAEL.

AND, HE WOULD CAST OUT THE GENTILES, WHO THEY VIEWED WERE WORTHY OF GOD'S WRATH.

FURTHERMORE, WE MAY IMAGINE THAT THE PEOPLE OF NAZARETH WOULD HAVE SOUGHT TO CLAIM A SPECIAL STATUS, SINCE JESUS GREW UP THERE.

IN A WAY, IT COULD BE SAID THEY HELPED RAISE HIM FROM CHILDHOOD TO MANHOOD, SO SURELY, THEY WOULD RECEIVE SPECIAL FAVOR FROM HIM.

HOWEVER, THEIR VISION WAS LIMITED, AND JESUS DID NOT COME TO DO THEIR WILL.

NOR DID HE COME TO DO THE WILL OF THE JEWISH NATION OR RELIGIOUS LEADERS, BUT ONLY THE WILL OF HIS FATHER.

OF COURSE, JESUS KNEW WHAT THEY WANTED TO SEE AND HEAR; AND HE ACTED TO MAKE IT VERY CLEAR HE WOULD NOT MEET THEIR EXPECTATIONS.

JESUS WOULD NOT FIT INTO THEIR BOX, AND THEREFORE, HE CHALLENGED THEIR VISION AND REFUSED TO CONFORM TO THEIR DESIRES.

THIS IS WHY HE INITIATED THE CONFLICT WHICH OCCURRED IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

FIRST, THE SAVIOR IMPLIED THAT NAZARETH WOULD NOT PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN GOD'S UNFOLDING PLAN.

THEN HE SAID THAT GOD SOMETIMES SENT HIS PROPHETS TO SAVE A GENTILE INSTEAD OF JEWS WHO ALSO NEEDED HELP

SUDDENLY THOSE IN THE SYNAGOGUE REALIZED THAT THEY COULD NOT CONTROL JESUS.

HE WOULD NOT GIVE THEM ANY SPECIAL BLESSINGS; HE WOULD NOT CONFORM TO THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS.

BUT WHILE THEY HAD NO POWER OVER JESUS, THEY DID STILL HAVE THE ABILITY TO CONTROL HOW THEY WOULD RESPOND TO HIS UNWELCOME MESSAGE.

AND NOTICE, THEY DID NOT SEEK UNDERSTANDING, THEY ASKED HIM NO QUESTIONS, NOR DID THEY TRY TO REASON WITH HIM.

INSTEAD, THEY ALLOWED THEIR ANGER TO OVERCOME THEIR REASON, AND THEY TRIED TO MURDER JESUS.

THE RAGE OF ONE PERSON CAN BE DEADLY, AND THE RAGE OF A MOB EVEN MORE SO, SINCE MOB ACTION CAN ROB OTHERWISE REASONABLE PEOPLE OF THEIR GOOD SENSE.

THE TRAGEDY FOR THE MOB OF NAZARETH IS THEY MISSED AN OPPORTUNITY THEY HAD TO REALLY LEARN GOD'S WILL.

THE SITUATION WITH JESUS IN NAZARETH BECAME DEADLY BECAUSE THOSE IN THE SYNAGOGUE WERE NOT INTERESTED IN UNDERSTANDING, NOR EVEN ARGUING WITH JESUS.

THEIR UNWILLINGNESS TO THINK BEFORE THEY ACTED IS WHAT LED THEM TO CROSS THE LINE INTO SIN.

NOW, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT SCRIPTURE SHOWS GOD IS WILLING TO LISTEN TO OUR ANGER.

THE PSALMS AND THE WRITINGS OF THE PROPHETS, ALONG WITH THE BOOK OF JOB, AND EVEN SOME OF THE WORDS OF MOSES ALL OFFER EXAMPLES OF ANGER TOWARDS GOD.

INDEED, THE LORD IS ACCUSED OF THINGS LIKE: NOT CARING, BEING UNFAIR, ASKING THE IMPOSSIBLE, AND MANY OTHER FAILURES TO COMPLY WITH WHAT THE PERSON DESIRED.

THE IMPORTANT THING WAS IN EACH CASE THE PERSON TURNED TO THE LORD.

SO, WE SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID OR ASHAMED IF WE FEEL ANGER AT GOD, ESPECIALLY IF WE ALSO TURN TO THE LORD AND SHARE WITH HIM WHAT GOD ALREADY KNOWS.

NO, WE WILL NOT ALWAYS RECEIVE WHAT WE DESIRE, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE ENGAGE WITH GOD RATHER THAN WALK AWAY AND ABANDON THE LORD.

YOU SEE, IN THE BIBLE, EVEN WHILE EXPRESSING DISMAY AND ANGER DAVID AND OTHERS WERE STILL GROUNDED IN A RECOGNITION OF THE GOODNESS AND SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

AND THAT GROUNDING IMPLIED AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT THEY COULD NOT PUT GOD INTO A BOX.

THIS WAS UNLIKE WHAT HAPPENED IN NAZARETH, WHEN THE PEOPLE DID NOT EVEN WISH TO CONSIDER JESUS MIGHT HAVE BEEN SPEAKING ON GOD'S BEHALF.

THEREFORE, THEY CHOOSE TO ALLOW ANGER TO CONTROL THEM.

AND THIS CAN BE A LESSON FOR PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY CHRISTIANS, TODAY.

THE GOSPEL STORY CHALLENGES US TO REFLECT ON HOW WE HAVE RESPONDED TO GOD IN THE PAST.

IT ALSO CALLS US TO RECOGNIZE WE HAVE CHOICES CONCERNING HOW WE REACT WHEN WE GET UPSET OR ANGRY WITH THE LORD.

HOW WE REACT, WHETHER WE ACCEPT GOD'S WILL, PROTEST GOD'S CHOICE, TRY TO PERSUADE GOD TO SEE THINGS OUR WAY, PRAY FOR STRENGTH TO ENDURE, OR TURN AWAY IN ANGER-- IS UP TO US.

THERE IS AN OLD FOLK TALE THAT MAY HELP TO ILLUSTRATE THE POWER WE HAVE IN OUR CHOICES.

ONCE THERE WAS AN OLD WOMAN WHO LIVED JUST OUTSIDE A SMALL VILLAGE. WHO WAS REPORTED TO BE VERY WISE.

SOME CHILDREN IN THE VILLAGE DID NOT BELIEVE WHAT THEIR ELDERS SAID ABOUT HER, AND SO THEY DECIDED TO CHALLENGE HER KNOWLEDGE.

THEY ASKED HER MANY QUESTIONS AND WERE SURPRISED WHEN SHE RESPONDED CORRECTLY TO ALL OF THEM.

BUT ONE BOY WAS DETERMINED TO SHOW THE WOMAN WAS NOT AS WISE AS EVERYONE SAID.

SO HE CAPTURED A SMALL BIRD, AND INVITED OTHER CHILDREN TO FOLLOW HIM TO THE WOMAN'S HOUSE.

HOLDING THE BIRD IN HIS HANDS, BEHIND HIS BACK HE APPROACHED THE WOMAN.

HE SAID IF SHE WAS SO WISE, SHE WOULD BE ABLE TO TELL HIM WHAT HE HAD IN HIS HANDS.

THE WOMAN PAUSED AND LISTENED, SHE THOUGHT SHE HEARD A FAINT RUSTLING OF WINGS, AND SAID SHE BELIEVED HE WAS HOLDING A BIRD.

THE BOY BECAME VERY ANGRY THAT HE HAD NOT FOOLED HER.

HE THEN DECIDED TO ASK IF THE BIRD WAS ALIVE OR DEAD, AND IF SHE SAID DEAD, HE WOULD PRESENT THE LIVING BIRD TO HER.

BUT IF SHE SAID THE BIRD WAS ALIVE HE WOULD CRUSH IT AND SHOW TO HER A DEAD BIRD.

THINKING HE WAS SURE TO PROVE HIS CASE AGAINST HER, HE ASKED: "IS THE BIRD I AM HOLDING DEAD OR ALIVE?"

THE WOMAN LOOKED THE BOY IN THE EYE AND QUIETLY TOLD HIM: "THE ANSWER MY YOUNG FRIEND IS IN YOUR HANDS."

HER WORDS FILLED HIM WITH SHAME AS HE REALIZED THE CRUEL THING HE HAD BEEN WILLING TO DO.

THEN HE OPENED HIS HANDS, AND AS THE BIRD FLEW AWAY, HE SAID "I AM SORRY LITTLE ONE."

THE WISE WOMAN HELPED THE BOY UNDERSTAND THAT WHAT WAS IN HIS HANDS WAS UNDER HIS CONTROL.

HE HAD A CHOICE TO MAKE, AND COULD CHOOSE TO DO RIGHT OR WRONG, TO ACT OUT OF ANGER OR COMPASSION, IGNORANCE OR UNDERSTANDING.

THIS IS NOT UNLIKE THE CHOICES WE MUST MAKE ALL OF THE TIME THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES.

AND THESE CHOICES INCLUDE HOW WE RELATE TO GOD WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS THAT SHOWS THE LORD IS NOT CONFORMING TO OUR EXPECTATIONS.

FOR EXAMPLE: IF WE ARE HONEST, WE MUST ADMIT THAT THERE ARE TIMES SCRIPTURE SHOWS THAT JESUS SAID OR DID SOMETHING THAT DOES NOT CONFORM TO OUR PERCEPTION OF HIM.

FURTHERMORE, THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS MOVED INDIVIDUALS AND CHURCHES IN DIFFERENT WAYS THROUGHOUT THE AGES.

YES, GOD HAS INITIATED CHANGES, WHICH SOMETIMES ARE NOT TO OUR LIKING.

THIS IS WHERE WE ARE CHALLENGED TO REALIZE- HOW WE RESPOND TO THE LORD IS IN OUR HANDS.

NO, WE CANNOT CONTROL GOD, BUT WE CAN DETERMINE HOW WE WILL RESPOND IN EACH SITUATION.

SOMETIMES WE WILL EASILY ACCEPT GOD'S WILL, OTHER TIMES WE MAY PROTEST OR SEEK UNDERSTANDING OR CLARIFICATION, OR WE MAY EVEN TURN AWAY FOR A WHILE.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE NAZARENE'S WAS PRIDE, WHICH IS OFTEN THE SAME PROBLEM WE HAVE WHEN JESUS DOES NOT FIT INTO OUR BOX.

BUT WE WHO ARE CHRISTIAN ARE CHALLENGED ALL THE MORE BECAUSE OF OUR CONFESSION OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

MAY WE DO BETTER THAN THE JESUS' HOMETOWN NEIGHBORS DID IN SURRENDERING TO OUR SAVIOR'S WORD AND GOD'S WILL.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT GOD IS LOVING AND FORGIVING. HIS GOODNESS AND MERCY IS SHOWN TO US IN JESUS HIS SON, AND GOD'S GRACE IS AVAILABLE ALWAYS.

FURTHERMORE, THE ALMIGHTY OFFERS US THE INSIGHT AND INSPIRATION OF HIS SPIRIT WITHIN US, TO HELP US IN OUR STRUGGLES.

AND WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT WHILE JESUS PROBABLY NEVER RETURNED TO NAZARETH, HE STILL DIED ON THE CROSS TO SAVE THEM, ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD.

THEREFORE, LET US OFFER THANKSGIVING TO GOD WHO FASHIONED AND MADE US, GUIDES US AND SAVES US. AMEN

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