

Pastorate Notes: Luke 4:14-30

The Kingdom of God is incredibly different from any kingdom of this world. One of the major ways this is so, is that God's Kingdom includes everyone in its benefits. While it is clearly the case that not everyone is 'in' the Kingdom, nevertheless, the doors are open to whomever will enter. We enter through repentance and faith; acknowledging that though we deserve nothing from God, yet He has freely given us all things in Christ.

Jesus showed us just how all-embracing the grace of God really is when he started his ministry. Following His time in the wilderness, He travelled back to his hometown of Nazareth. He went to the synagogue and was invited to read. The text He chose was Isaiah 61: a well-known passage about the long-hoped for Servant of God (the Messiah), who would come to free Israel (or so it was understood at the time) from her bondage and oppression, and bring in an eternal 'year of Jubilee', the "year of the Lord's favour." (See Lev 25)

After reading the passage, He proceeded to tell the people that He Himself was the fulfillment of this Messianic hope. Of course, this came as quite a shock to many of the people from his hometown. The passage reads "*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words.*" Another possible translation of this passage is: "All bore witness to Him, and were shocked at His words of grace." Either way, the passage is telling us that the people were gobsmacked by what they were hearing: "Isn't this Joseph's son?", they asked.

Jesus, clearly picking up on their amazement, went on to essentially, pick a fight with the crowd. In so doing, He spoke powerfully about the nature of the Kingdom of God, challenging the expectations of His people as to what the "year of Jubilee" referred to.

When Jesus read the Isaiah passage, it appears He intentionally left out a portion of the passage that dealt with the "day of vengeance" against Israel's enemies, a section that the audience would have thought to be an important (and central) part of the Messiah's mission for God. In order to bring in the Jubilee, God would have to crush Israel's enemies in the process.

Instead, Jesus leaves the "day of vengeance" unspoken, a possible indication that although vengeance and judgement would one day come (Jesus certainly teaches this elsewhere in the gospels), it will not come either the way Israel expects, or upon whom Israel expects. In fact, Jesus tells many parables about this very thing, such as Luke 18:9-14.

Jesus provokes them by saying: "You will quote to me this proverb: "Physician, heal yourself!" This did not mean (at that time), 'fix yourself first, and then talk to us', but rather, something like: "Doctor, look to your own first, and then heal others." But Jesus goes on to say (and I paraphrase): "what I have to tell you, you will not be able to accept" (a prophet is not accepted in His hometown), which I don't believe is directed only at the people of Nazareth, but a reference to all Israel.

Jesus then goes on to make His point clear: God has come to show grace to all, favour to all people, not just Israel. The invite to God's great wedding banquet is for anyone who will accept it. (See Matt 22:1-14)

To make this point He references Elijah and Elisha, who are two major prophetic voices in Israel's history. He reminds them that neither of these prophets healed the 'insiders' of the

Israelite people, but were sent to 'outsiders' who, as it happens, were sworn enemies of Israel at the time.

As seen in those episodes, God was willing to show His redeeming power to people who were not Israelites, who were not among the 'chosen'. The point is made loud and clear to the people of Nazareth, so much so that it stirs them up into a murderous rage.

And what does this story tell us? The Good News of God's Kingdom is often not received by those who perceive themselves to be 'insiders' with God, but is often received joyfully as a life-giving word of grace by those who know they are 'outside'.

There is a beautiful reversal going on in God's Kingdom, whereby God is willing to leave the 99 to go after the one lost sheep; that God exalts the humble, but opposes the proud; that God does not come to call the righteous, but the sinner; and that God desires mercy, not sacrifice. (See Matt 9)

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the sermon from Sunday - specifically, ask what it might look like for a church to try and embody this radical grace of the Kingdom of God? Who are the 'outsiders' or 'insiders' in many churches today? Does living this kind of radical grace mean that we don't take sin seriously? What is the judgement of God on sin?
2. Have you ever been an 'outsider'? Have you ever felt judged or excluded? What about the reverse? Have you ever made someone else feel like an outsider?
3. There are many of us who struggle with living in judgment. What are some reasons that getting life from judging others is such a deep temptation? What are some ways that this temptation can be faced and defeated? How do we seek forgiveness?
4. Think about a time where you've experienced a role reversal: a time when the outsiders became the insiders or the insiders became outsiders. Have you seen examples of God's radical grace and acceptance at work in the lives of both insiders and outsiders, to bring reconciliation and healing? Can you think of any examples from history?

Prayer

Ask the Holy Spirit to come and help you as you pray for each other.

Ask for forgiveness for any time you have treated someone as an outsider. Ask God for grace to forgive those who have judged you.

Pray that you might have an opportunity to be reconciled with those people.

Please pray for the church, and its leaders, and especially for a continuing work of the Holy Spirit to make us the kind of community that embodies the grace of God, as Jesus describes it in Luke 4.