

Living Lent | Day 17

Hold Up

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.’”

“Truly I tell you,” He continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 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. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 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. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Luke 4:23–30 RSV

Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

Just before this passage begins in Luke, we find Jesus in the synagogue unrolling the scroll of Isaiah and pointing to Himself as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy. We read that all the people were “amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips.” Now, just six short verses later, all the crowd is furious with Him and ready to heave Him over the cliff. So, what happened? How did the people go from exceeding delight to extreme displeasure?

The words read from the Isaiah scroll seemed to be sweet and savory to those listening. Jesus was here to proclaim good news, freedom, recovery, and favor. Jesus was announcing God’s blessing would be poured out all over them. Or, was He? Those gathered that day may have been eager to hear what was in store for them, as the recipients of their very own hometown prophet. However, by leaning in

to listen more carefully, the good news was for the poor, freedom was for the oppressed and the prisoners, and recovery for the blind.

Jesus wastes no time as He reads the room and offers his very first recorded sermon. Jesus confronts their misunderstanding by reminding His audience of two key prophets who were sent beyond the boundaries of Israel, Elijah and Elisha. If I may take some creative liberties, basically, it feels like Jesus is saying, “Hold up. You have it all wrong. I am getting a strong whiff of entitlement. The blessings of my Father are not exclusively yours to claim. It appears you have tuned a deaf ear to my very heartbeat for the world.”

Whew. So glad this sermon isn’t directed at us today. Or, is it? Ruth Anne Reese, Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary writes, “Do we feel entitled to the work of Jesus among us? Or, do we share with Jesus his concern for the marginalized and vulnerable and for those beyond the boundaries of our local congregation.”

I admit, it is so easy to nestle in on Sundays and share life with those who look like us, think and believe like us, and behave like us. But what about those who may never enter the walls of our homes or our spaces of worship? Have we made every effort to sit at their feet and listen to their stories?

May we bulldoze the self-erected barriers cemented around us that have hindered us from hearing the very heartbeat of the gospel as we pursue our neighbors with sincerity and love.

Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ

Ashley Guthas is the Youth Ministry Intern at The Church at Wieuca in an area of North Atlanta known as Buckhead. Ashley is a graduate of the State University of West Georgia with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish. Currently, she is a Glen Harold Stassen Fellow in the Master of Divinity program at McAfee School of Theology. Since 2001, she has consistently lived out her calling to serve pre-teens and young adults within the walls of the church and beyond. She is passionate about cultivating an atmosphere where all embrace their worth in Christ and discipling students to live out 1 Timothy 4:12. One of her greatest joys in student ministry is being an ongoing part of individual lives even as their student ministry days are far behind them. Morningstar Children’s Home has long been supported by the Ministry and Congregation of The Church at Wieuca~a blessing indeed!

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