

No Room at Home

Jeremiah 1: 4-10

Luke 4: 21-30

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Jeremiah 1: 4-10

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Luke 4: 21-30

Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

When you examine the word of God, the word of God examines you.

I came across these wise, insightful words recently while reading an article by pastor and author Jack Wellman, as he offered ways to make great changes in a new year.¹

Get into the Word,” he said, ‘and the Word gets into you. Examine the Word and the Word examines you. Go through the Word of God and the Word of God will go through you.’”

While this is intended as positive pastoral wisdom for us for the new year, I was also struck by how taking this advice could invoke fear and fury when the Word of God says what people do not want to hear, just as it did for the congregation in Jesus’ home synagogue as the reality, the intensity, the urgency, of the Word of God spoken by the son of the carpenter Joseph hit home and quickly changed their amazement to anger, their respect to rage, their wonder to wrath.

They heard Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah, they heard the prophet’s promises of

good news for the poor, release of the captives, recovery of sight for the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And then they heard the first words that Jesus speaks in Luke's Gospel, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The people did not like what they heard, and they did not hear what they wanted to hear. Jesus did not continue the passage in Isaiah that goes on to say that the Lord will trample down all Israel's enemies, crush them underfoot and restore Israel to its rightful place. The people are waiting for a warrior Messiah to free them from Roman occupation, yet these were not words that Jesus read as he instead spoke of overturning the status quo where they were comfortable. He then claimed that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah's words, Isaiah's dream, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The carpenter-turned-prophet spoke of helping, healing, others, but not the people of his hometown. Just like Jeremiah, Jesus, this new prophet, tells the truth about the present and gives hope to God's presence for all. They have the words of God in their mouths, as they are appointed over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

The congregation in the synagogue wanted proof and signs that his radical announcement could be truthful, but he would not do so, choosing to follow in the footsteps of Elijah and Elisha, whose help went only to those beyond their own borders and culture, always mindful in showing that God's care, compassion and presence are for all people.

With a strong sense of entitlement since they had known Jesus for so long, their expectations demanded him to heal, yet for that very reason he would not. With a strong sense of envy for the people of Capernaum, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.' Jesus would not.

When you examine the word of God, the word of God examines you.

Seething with anger as their entitlement, envy and desire for the status quo were suddenly and clearly seen, they chased Jesus out and away from the synagogue, and to the edge of the cliff in murderous rage. They acted as one in their reaction, resentment and rejection.

There had been no room for him in the inn on the night he was born, and there was no longer any room for him in his hometown. The crowd acted as one against him in Nazareth, and in three years a crowd will do the same in Jerusalem.

Jesus read the Scripture verses from Isaiah, and his sermon was a single sentence that is still speaking to us. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Today. This day, this moment, this scripture has been fulfilled in their hearing. This day, this moment, this scripture has been fulfilled in *our* hearing. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are still participating in bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, seeing to the recovery of sight to the blind, setting the oppressed free, and striving for the year of the Lord's favor as a time of rest and renewal in which everyone will be given a clean slate, a new beginning, a fresh start.

When you examine the word of God, the word of God examines you.

Today, we hear Jesus speak these words from Isaiah. Do we welcome them, or do we reject them as a challenge our status quo, our sense of entitlement?

The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

-to bring plenty of healthy things to eat to those who suffer food insecurity

-to create more low-income housing for those who cannot afford current rents and utilities

- to provide clean drinking water for all
- to knock down our system of profits at the expense of people
- to grant us a sense of worth that has nothing to do with our social status or bank accounts

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

- to correct the inequalities of our legal and prison systems
- to banish desire for cheap goods that come from exploited laborers
- to welcome those who do not feel welcome
- to restore dignity and hope to the alienated and depressed
- to free the weight of guilt from those who falsely blame themselves

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has sent me to offer recovery of sight to the blind.

- to restore the vision of those who have lost confidence for a good future
- to bring hope to those who cannot see the possibility of a new tomorrow
- to change the way we see others who are different from us
- to see a person beyond their race
- to see the image of God in every single person

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

- to offer grace upon grace for a fresh start
- to bring peace to those who struggle to let go of a painful, troubled past
- to wipe away the debts accumulated through systems of complex imbalances
- to announce that God's favor is upon us all.

Get into the Word and the Word gets into you. Examine the Word and the Word examines you. Go through the Word of God and the Word of God will go through you.

Have Jesus' words gotten into you, examined you and are lived out through you as today, as every day, his words are fulfilled in our hearing? Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2017/12/27/5-great-ways-to-change-your-new-year/>