

Who Are “My People”?

On Sunday, we continued our new sermon series called “Journey To The Cross” by exploring a Gospel passage offering yet another critical clue as to why Jesus was killed.

1. Warm up question. In today’s passage, at the start of his ministry, Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth. Where’s your hometown? Tell us a little about it.
2. Read Luke 4:14-22. After spending a period of time in the wilderness, Jesus returned to Galilee and began to minister, speaking in synagogues and performing miracles of healing. Soon he passed through his own hometown of Nazareth.
 - a. Verse 16 says it was “his custom” to go the synagogue each Sabbath. Why do you think a weekly worship gathering was so important to Jesus?
 - b. Verses 18-19 capture the vision Jesus had for his ministry. Based on what you see there, how would you summarize his sense of mission?
 - c. Imagine how the world would be different if churches consistently embraced the mission Jesus articulates in verses 18-19. Think about the church you grew up in. Did it reflect the vision of verses 18-19? In your view, how close is LifeJourney coming to living that vision?
 - d. As verse 22 makes clear, the people in Jesus’ hometown were very impressed with him and loved what they heard so far. Why were they so excited?
3. Read Luke 4:23-30. In verse 23, the story takes a strange turn. Apparently some of the people of Nazareth had heard about miracles Jesus performed in the nearby town of Capernaum and wanted Jesus to do similar miracles in Nazareth. Jesus reply proved very controversial. He mentions two Old Testament stories where miraculous blessings are given to foreigners instead of Israelites.
 - a. What do you make of Jesus’ response? What point was he trying to make?
 - b. Why do you think the people of Nazareth got so angry at Jesus’ response?
 - c. Look again at verses 29-30. If you were filming this for a movie, what would the scene look like, especially verse 30? In other words, how did Jesus get away?
4. In *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Alan Culpepper interprets the reaction of the people of Nazareth like this: “The people of Jesus hometown read the Scriptures as promises of God’s exclusive covenant with them, a covenant that involved promises of deliverance from their oppressors. Jesus came announcing deliverance, but it was not a national deliverance. It was God’s promise of liberation for all the poor and oppressed regardless of nationality, gender, or race. When the radical inclusiveness of Jesus’ announcement became clear to those gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth, their commitment to their own community boundaries took

precedence over their joy that God had sent a prophet among them. In the end, because they were not open to the prospect of others sharing in the bounty of God's deliverance, they themselves were unable to receive it."

- a. Do you buy that interpretation? Why or why not?
 - b. At its core, Luke 4 is a story of human prejudice and tribalism. It lays bare our natural tendency to care about "our people," while being indifferent to "outsiders." We naturally tend to empathize with those who are like us, but struggle to relate to those who have a different life experience. Why is that?
 - c. Think about a challenge or struggle you've experienced in your own life. How do you feel toward others who go through that same experience?
 - d. When in your life have you struggled to related to (or empathize with) people who are different from you?
5. Read Luke 10:25-37. Bear in mind that Jesus told this parable to a Jewish audience. From the Jewish perspective, Samaritans were foreigners with a foreign religion. Jews were prejudiced against Samaritans and vice versa.
- a. Why do you think Jesus chose to make a Samaritan the hero of his parable?
 - b. The Jews had been commanded to "love their neighbor." That leads to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Based on the parable, what's the answer to that question? According to Jesus, who is my neighbor?
6. Near the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells another parable foreshadowing that his movement would ultimately include lots of Gentiles. "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard [this] . . . they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds." (Mt. 21:43.) Eventually, they were able to arrest him – and the rest is history. Ephesians 2:14 says, "For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people, when in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us." According to this verse, one the reasons Jesus died was his determination to challenge the boundaries of racism and tribalism.
- a. Jeff told a story about some white students who were finally able to hear the pain of their black friends and stand with them, instead of being defensive about it. When in your life did the story of the struggle of black people in America first begin to penetrate your heart for real? What happened to open you up?
 - b. Re-read the poem on the next page. What words in the poem do you find most enlightening, compelling, or challenging?
 - c. Take a look at the picture on the next page of a Syrian father, fleeing war, carrying his daughter. Tell the story you see written on his face? What's gone before? What's he thinking and feeling? If you were him, what would you hope we would do? What do you think we can/should do?



Home, by Warsan Shire

*no one leaves home unless
 home is the mouth of a shark
 you only run for the border
 when you see the whole city running as well
 your neighbors running faster than you
 breath bloody in their throats
 the boy you went to school with
 who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
 is holding a gun bigger than his body
 you only leave home
 when home won't let you stay.
 no one leaves home unless home chases you
 fire under feet
 hot blood in your belly
 it's not something you ever thought of doing
 until the blade burnt threats into
 your neck
 and even then you carried the anthem under
 your breath
 only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
 sobbing as each mouthful of paper
 made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.
 you have to understand,
 that no one puts their children in a boat
 unless the water is safer than the land
 no one burns their palms
 under trains
 beneath carriages
 no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a
 truck
 feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
 means something more than journey.
 no one crawls under fences
 no one wants to be beaten
 pitied
 no one chooses refugee camps
 or strip searches where your
 body is left aching
 or prison,
 because prison is safer
 than a city of fire
 and one prison guard*

*in the night
 is better than a truckload
 of men who look like your father
 no one could take it
 no one could stomach it
 no one skin would be tough enough
 the
 go home blacks
 refugees
 dirty immigrants
 asylum seekers
 sucking our country dry
 [beggars] with their hands out
 they smell strange
 savage
 messed up their country and now they want
 to mess ours up
 how do the words
 the dirty looks
 roll off your backs
 maybe because the blow is softer
 than a limb torn off
 or the words are more tender
 than fourteen men between
 your legs
 or the insults are easier
 to swallow
 than rubble
 than bone
 than your child body
 in pieces.
 i want to go home,
 but home is the mouth of a shark
 home is the barrel of the gun
 and no one would leave home
 unless home chased you to the shore
 unless home told you
 to quicken your legs
 leave your clothes behind
 crawl through the desert
 wade through the oceans
 drown
 save
 be hunger
 beg
 forget pride
 your survival is more important
 no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in
 your ear
 saying-
 leave,
 run away from me now
 i don't know what i've become
 but i know that anywhere
 is safer than here*