

## Sermon at Nazareth – Luke 4:14-30

Maybe it's just me, but I've often felt that the crowd listening to Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth overreacted a little bit. I mean, what did he say that made them so mad?

Jesus had already made a bit of a name for himself in Galilee. We're not given the content of his teaching up to this point, but he impressed people.

Now, he's back in his hometown of Nazareth at his local synagogue. Jesus is the teacher that day.

Apparently in synagogues, there was no one rabbi responsible for the sermon, or teaching each week. Jesus may have volunteered this Sabbath, or maybe he was asked by others in the synagogue.

The appointed reading for the day came from the prophet Isaiah. We just read that passage during Advent.

In it the prophet points to an anointed one...a messiah...messiah means anointed one. This messiah will do all the things the prophet listed.

The people of Judah have been waiting 400 years for this anointed one to show up.

After Jesus finishes reading, he says Today, this reading has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Whoa...Jesus? Jesus is the anointed messiah? Jesus, Mary and Joseph's son?

People are amazed! They're a little puzzled...probably not sure what to think. But they speak well of him. This part isn't what makes them mad.

Jesus could have ended right there...left everyone feeling a little hint of excited anticipation...given them something to talk about over their Shabbat supper.

But from there, it's like he wanted to make them mad. Jesus said doubtless you will tell me you want me to do the things here I've done elsewhere. And you'll say Doctor cure yourself! And you'll reject your own prophet.

But notice nobody in the crowd did or said any of that. They spoke well of him.

It's what he said after that that caused the problem.

When there was widespread famine in Elijah's day, there were plenty of poor widows with starving children in Israel. Yet Elijah was sent elsewhere...to Zarephath...to a widow who wasn't Jewish.

And of all the possible lepers needing cleansed in Israel, Elisha cleansed Naaman, a Syrian.

That...made those folks at Nazareth mad. Filled them with rage...they were so mad they wanted to kill him right then and there.

Still, it seems like a bit of an overreaction. But clearly, the idea that the work of God's anointed might be for someone else before them was a problem.

When you think about it, at this point Israel, or as it's now called, Judah, has lived for 2000 years under their identity as God's chosen people.

For 2000 years they have struggled with what that meant. God was pretty clear – Abraham and Sarah were chosen to be the parents of this chosen nation so that through them all the families of the earth will be blessed.

But human nature does its thing. The chosen people repeatedly failed to follow through on their mission to bring God's blessing to the world. Chosen had likely come to mean something different than what God intended. Something more selfish.

Now, they've been living under an oppressive regime and are anxious for God to send this Messiah to come free them. But apparently, here in the synagogue in Nazareth, those folks have no interest in hearing that this anointed one isn't just about Nazareth or Judah...or even about Judah first.

In my devotional readings this week, the topic has been stories...how stories shape who we are and how we see ourselves. Author Brian McLaren talks about framing stories. Framing stories shape a society and a people.

It sounds to me like what Jesus had to say did not fit with the framing story the people of Nazareth were situated in.

They wanted Jesus to fit into their narrative. They weren't interested in Jesus' framing story if it didn't go the way they expected. And it would seem their narrative didn't have much room for that which wasn't them.

So let's talk a little bit about this business of framing stories to help us think about today's story.

McLaren says there are six framing stories that run societies. More than one story can be operative at a time. Others have said similar things, but I like the clarity of how he lays it out.

**Slide 1 (see slide handout at end of sermon)**

It's helpful to think of each of these framing stories as a story that says "we'll be OK when...."

These stories still operate today. Like the folks at Nazareth, we are tempted to want to make Jesus fit into our favored one of these framing stories.

When we do that, we create an idol...we create Jesus in our image. It looks like this in the framing stories:

We believe Jesus is on the side of our dominant group...we expect Jesus to sanctify our desire for revenge...we expect Jesus to back violence because it seems justified...we expect Jesus to justify the unequal distribution of wealth.

We think Jesus wants us to change or get rid of people who don't fit our sexual or gender norms. And when all else fails, we just want Jesus to join us in our sanctuaries and chapels and prayer spaces where we can avoid the world.

But there is a seventh story. **(slide 2)**

This is the story that Jesus invites us into. This slide shows some of the names that story has...kingdom of God, reign or realm of God, new creation, or as some are saying now, the kingdom of God.

Tomorrow is the observation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Martin Luther King Jr. brought the term "beloved community" into our national conversation about justice.

The beloved community is not really meant to be a full vision of the kingdom of God. Bringing that to completion is the work of God and the Spirit.

But King did view the beloved community as something achievable in the here and now by human effort, guided and empowered by the spirit. Here's what the King Center in Atlanta says about this beloved community:

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-

inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

It actually doesn't sound too unlike the world Jesus announced in his sermon at Nazareth. It is more that 7<sup>th</sup> framing story. And I think even non-Christians can inhabit that story.

It's easy for us to think that this is some sort of pie in the sky future vision. But Jesus said "today...today this has been fulfilled in your hearing...today this is the new reality...today...and from this day and forever, you have a new framing story."

## Slide handout

1/17/2021

Framing Stories (att. to Brian McLaren)

Story	We'll be OK when....	Example in Jesus' world
1. Domination story	1. Our group is in charge	1. Roman Empire (with Sadducees/Herodians)
2. Revolution story	2. We overthrow the oppressors	2. Zealots
3. The purification story	3. We change or get rid of those who don't fit our purity code	3. Scribes and Pharisees
4. The victimization story	4. Our past oppressors are brought to justice - revenge	4. Maybe peasants, Samaritans
5. The isolation story	5. We can withdraw from the world	5. Essenes
6. The accumulation story	6. We have enough money and material goods	6. Wealthy landowners, tax collectors, stewards

## Seventh Story

Jesus invites us into a seventh story - the Kingdom of God, the new creation, the realm of God, reign of God, Kin-dom of God.