

Sunday, February 2, 2025 ~ Luke 4:21-30

There's an old saying: Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you do criticize them, you're a mile away, and you have their shoes.

Jesus doesn't criticize His townspeople from afar, so they try to grab him and throw him off a cliff. What happened?

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 3, verse 9, Jesus tells his listeners that they shouldn't assume they are in with God because they are descendants of Abraham. In that scripture, Jesus declares that God could raise children for Abraham from stones. Now, Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel. A nation that God set apart as monotheistic nation, in a world of pantheism, a nation established by God for the purposes of illustrating the personal, intimate relationship between humanity and God in the eventual incarnation. In other words, as far as divine purpose goes, the nation of Israel was a pretty big deal. If there was ever a time in human history when a nation had reason to consider itself more important than any other, it was Israel during the time of Jesus. And If anyone knew that, it was Jesus. And yet, in today's scripture, Jesus points out that God's prophets, Elija and Elisha, went to the unchosen people just as easily as to

the chosen. Jesus, who was a Jew. Jesus, the Jewish man, the Messiah predicted by the Jewish scripture, said that God's prophets were sent to non-Jews, people the Jews hated! Not only that...Jesus references Elisha and Elija visiting a foreign **widow** and a foreign **leper...two** foreign **outcasts**. These Nazarenes that Jesus was talking to were feeling special because Jesus was a hometown boy and they did not want to be reminded of God's inclusive nature, and they were furious at Jesus for mentioning it. They wanted to kill Him, throw him off of a cliff! Even though they thought he was amazing, even though they recognized that He had a gift from God, He pushed them too far when he threatened their national pride.

If I say to you that the United States of America is no more important to God than Ireland is, would that anger you? Would you be upset because you think the U.S. is God's country? Think about it. That anger is the same anger that the Nazarenes felt toward Jesus. If I say to you that it is fine to say "God bless America" but it is far better to say "God bless humanity" does that make you angry? Annoyed? Uncomfortable? If it does unsettle you, lean into that anger,

annoyance and discomfort...that's where you will meet what Jesus is trying to say here.

There is no one nationality that God loves more than any other. That's Jesus talking, not me. God so loved the **world**, remember? According to research done with astronauts who have seen earth from space one of the most prominent common aspects of personally experiencing the Earth from space is an increased sense of connection to other people and the Earth as a whole. We are all connected. We are all humans. We are all earthlings. We are all brothers and sisters. When we treat each other with disrespect, or contempt... When we dehumanize each other, when we commit acts of violence...we sin against God who is the father of all of us.

Whatever we do to each other, we do to Jesus.

In middle school, we teach the students that when they see someone getting bullied they should speak out. We teach our students that to stand by silently when someone is being bullied is to be complicit in that bullying. As adults, we need to hear that same lesson. As Christians we need to remember that Jesus told us that whatever we do to the least of these, we do to him.

We can't claim Abraham as our father so to speak. We are not above any other group of humans.

Tribalism is rooted in fear. The Nazarenes that Jesus was preaching to expected a sign from Jesus because Jesus was a Nazarene and they thought that gave them special privilege. But Jesus responds by telling them that not only does his hometown not get special privilege, not even the Nation of Israel gets special privilege. Galatians 3:28 assures us that God's love goes beyond Borders. God's love goes beyond borders of hometowns and borders of nations, because in Christ there is no east or west. God's love goes beyond borders that are social constructs because in Christ there is no male or female, and God's love goes beyond borders that are political constructs because in Christ there is no Jew or Gentile. one's geographic location does not determine one's worth in the eyes of God, unless of course you are talking about the whole earth. Because every human being on this planet is a child of God. When you die you will not be a French or Spanish or an American soul, you will be a human soul, exactly what you are now. You did nothing to make yourself worthy of becoming a human being. God called you into existence in love. You did nothing to be born where you

were born, or when you were born. It is truly a blessing if you were born into a place and time and a family where you feel free and safe, and if that leads you to say “God bless America” that’s definitely a good thing, as gratitude is good. But there is a world of difference between being grateful and being arrogant. Between claiming God as a national ally and praising God as the source of all being and beings. Jesus could have stood in that synagogue in Nazareth and sucked in all of the praise and admiration...he could have soaked up being the hometown hero, but he nipped it in the bud. He could have encouraged the tribal adoration, but he dismissed the idea that God’s love had borders. And in doing so he really pissed people off.

It’s good to appreciate having a homeland. It is holy to understand that that homeland is earth.

Brothers and sisters, the earth is God’s creation. We human beings are all children of God. Everywhere on earth should be safe for all of our human brothers and sisters and if there is an imbalance in the scales of well-being among our human family, then we should seek to balance it, in our country and on the planet.

Jesus is our example. He gave himself, God gave God's self to humanity, so that He could hold up humanity's side of the covenant. We celebrate the sacrament of communion today remembering His gift to us. Remembering that Jesus, God, in God's great gift of love and mercy, broke through the border separating humanity from God, desperate to teach us to love each other. We gather for communion, and we remember the covenant that God has established with us, with humanity, the unbreakable covenant because God is holding up both ends with unconditional love. As we gather, remembering this covenant, let us also remember that this covenant is for **all** people.