

Expectations – Luke 4:21-30

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When you go back to your hometown or when you gather with hometown friends that you haven't seen in a long time, there's probably a set of expectations. Especially if you come from a small town, setting foot back in that community where a good number of the folks who still live there remember you can bring about expectations that are extensions of who you were as a kid.

If you were a kid who lived a charmed life, the folks back home that you grew up around will probably still carry those same expectations of you as an adult. They will expect you to be the achiever you were then. If you were a kid who was more defiant and had a bit of a wild streak, that expectation will travel with you back home too.

It's because this is how people remember you. They remember your kindness or defiance, your successes or your failures, your families and your affiliations.

I remember when I went back to my hometown for my dad's funeral about a year and a half ago, I settled back into that familiar identity somewhat. All the adults in my life then who were still around treated me similarly to how they did when I last left as a teenager.

Many times, when we go home, we're the same people we were as kids—just more mature. Sometimes, though, our old friends or people who simply remember us as kids will learn that we're different in some ways compared to when we were growing up there.

Our setting for today's gospel is Jesus back in his hometown. It's a continuation of last week's story where Jesus had arrived back in Nazareth where he had been raised and was teaching in the synagogue. And there, in his reading of the text from Isaiah, we talked about how it was in his DNA to do that. He fell back on what was familiar and strengthening to him: life amid his church family. And that's in our DNA, too, as people of faith.

So, the story continues today, and everybody is gladhanding him. Luke says that everyone was raving about Jesus, so impressed were they by the gracious words flowing from his lips. Yes, yes, this was Joseph's son!

The favored son was back, and he had done good. But then things quickly changed. The gathered masses discovered that he wasn't just Joseph's kid anymore. Their love and admiration quickly turned into anger and disdain.

And the reason for the turn of emotions really has to do with what Jesus said. Because right in the middle of all their pride and praise, he just goes off. "No doubt you'll quote me the old proverb, 'Physician, heal thyself.' And you'll probably want me to do here what you've heard I've been doing in Carpernaum, that land so full of the Gentiles. Well, guess what, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. And when the prophets of old came to do miracles and wonders, more often than not it was for Israel's enemies. So back off." (David Lose, *Working Preacher*, 2013)

What's gotten into Jesus? Is he offended that they're surprised that he's done so well? Does he hear a challenge in their words: "Who does he think he is, anyway, he's *just* Joseph's son!?" Is he skeptical of their praise, suspicious that they just want to exploit him as a healer? Or was he just in an owly mood? We can't say for sure.

He knows these people, though. And he knows what their expectations are: that he will take care of them, that his primary concern will be with them — the people of his hometown, the people who know him, the people who were his lineage.

Jesus strikes a very different chord, though. He says that his ministry is much broader than just the widows of Israel (as Elijah the prophet was not sent to them but to a widow in Sidon, home of Gentiles). He said his ministry was much broader than to just heal the people in Israel of their diseases (whom Elisha didn't go to but instead went and healed an outsider from Syria).

In essence, he dismissed his friends and family of his hometown for a much broader mission: the care and concern of outsiders as much as insiders. He's not thinking locally on this day, instead declaring that God loves *all* the world and has a special concern for the poor.

His hometown friends don't think kindly of his attitude. In fact, they get angry and run him out of town — in fact, up to the crest of a hill where they were prepared to throw him off.

Everybody who loved him turned on him and was prepared to do away with him. Because he wasn't the kid they remembered. He was as concerned with foreigners as he was them. His world was bigger than just them.

"You see, it really is all Jesus' fault — he goes and does the one thing you're never supposed to do, even to strangers, let alone to friends and neighbors: He tells them the truth, the truth about their pettiness and prejudice, their fear and shame, their willingness, even eagerness, to get ahead at any cost, even at the expense of another. And so they want him gone in the most permanent of ways." (David Lose, *Working Preacher*, 2013)

Again, last week, we talked about how we come home to our roots—our faith and our faith communities—amid the topsy turvy world we live in. It's in our DNA. We have our roots in our faith. And in our communities, we have comfort.

In doing so, though, we forget that Jesus' love extends beyond our communities and communities like ours. It extends to those on the outside, to those who don't have faith, to those who aren't diligent about being faithful, to those who don't have any concern for religion or its rituals.

And just like in the parable of the prodigal son, where the father lavishly welcomes home the wayward child and the eldest and loyal son looks on with disgust, we get angry sometimes that Jesus would love all these outsiders as much as he loves us.

We sort of lead him up a hillside and threaten to push him off the edge, too, through our resentment for those who aren't on the inside.

"So what are we to do? Now that Jesus' words have revealed the truth that we've got just as much fear and shame and prejudice as did the folks in Nazareth, what are we to do?"

"Well, we keep our eyes fastened on the one who told the truth in the first place, the one we nailed to a cross because of it. Because of all the prophets, of all the folks who came and told the truth only to be rejected, or beaten, or killed, this is the only one God raised from the dead.

"And in Christ's cross and resurrection we discover that Jesus' word – really, Jesus the Word – not only reveals the truth about us, but also reveals the truth about God, about a God so passionate for God's people that God takes on our lot and our life, becomes one of us, even to the point of dying for us, only to come back bringing again a word of forgiveness and grace. For this God

loves *all* God's children – desperately, passionately, relentlessly – and that includes you and me.” (David Lose, *Working Preacher*, 2013)

And we can then share that same good news with everyone we meet.

Whether we are insiders or outsiders, whether we cling to a faith community like this or flat out reject them, God loves everybody. In our words, but maybe more importantly in our attitudes and posture toward others, we can show grace that comes with being loved this much.

One of the blessings that comes out of tragedies—like hurricanes and fires and airplanes and helicopters that crash into each other like they did this past week, is the fact that we don't separate victims according to their insider or outsider status. If you've lost your home or your community or your loved ones in tragic events like this, we (usually) don't parcel out relief, prayers, loving gestures, or sympathy according to your religious, social, or cultural status. No matter where we come from, what we believe, or what status we hold, we are all God's children. We're all the same when tragedy strikes. And we act accordingly, bringing relief and assistance to the victims.

Unfortunately, that uniformity usually doesn't last after the dust of tragedy has settled. In time, we revert back to picking and choosing who should be on the receiving end of God's favor.

Jesus doesn't pick and choose who to show mercy to (although he goes out of his way to show love and concern for the poor and outcast). We're all equal when it comes to receiving the richness of God's amazing grace. Whether we're from his hometown or outside of it and from the other side of the tracks, he goes to and blesses all.

The people from his hometown had a hard time stomaching this reality. They had certain expectations for him. Our expectations for him should be grounded in what we know about him: nobody is left out of the circle of his marvelous love.