

Epiphany 4 C
Luke 4:21-30
February 2, 2025

“Hometown Boy”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³He 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.’” ²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵But 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; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They 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. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

~o~

I’d like to begin this morning by making a covenant with you. I’ll covenant with you to try really hard not to preach absolutely terrible sermons if you’ll covenant with me not to throw me off a cliff! Can you believe this crowd?! It’s hard for me to imagine what any preacher might say that would make me respond the way that crowd did. I can imagine getting angry at the preacher. I can imagine saying nasty things in the

parking lot or during coffee fellowship. I can even imagine getting up and walking out during a service. But, throwing the preacher off the cliff—impossible! I have to remember, though, this *is* Jesus we're talking about and he had a reputation for doing the impossible. I guess it shouldn't really surprise us after all.

What exactly *did* Jesus say to get the hometown crowd so riled up? He started with a scripture reading and he concluded with six sentences that nearly cost him his life. It was a very short, but very impactful sermon! As an aside, in seminary we learned about preaching. We were encouraged to aim for 10-15 minutes and no longer. Some preachers like the classic “three points and a poem” format. Jesus spoke six sentences. And you think my sermons are short! For real though, those six sentences sure packed a punch.

Initially filled with praise, the crowd was clearly proud of the hometown boy, back to pay his respects to the community that raised him. Their pride quickly turned to dismay and then rage as he spoke. While the crowd itself expected a display of power, they soon learned that as the prophets Elijah and Elisha had done, Jesus would minister elsewhere to those truly in need. He called to mind the non-Jewish widow, hungry during a famine, and the non-Jewish general, Naaman, languishing with leprosy as the kinds of people to which he was called to minister: people on the margins, people in the shadows, people in need. He hurt the hometown crowd's sense of identity. He hurt their pride. And they were furious.

Have you ever gotten angry during a sermon? Most of us, if not all, have now heard of the sermon preached recently at the Service of Prayer for the Nation at the National Cathedral. The sermon was on the foundations of unity. The preacher concluded by asking for mercy on behalf of those who are scared, especially transgender children and migrant workers and their families. Some of the responses have been akin to what I imagine Jesus himself experienced after his own fateful sermon in Nazareth. One high-profile Detroit minister said publicly that, “She is the worst preacher

I have ever in my life heard.” He described her words as “theological malpractice” and “demonic” and labeled her “so arrogant” and “a heretic.” Others have said much worse. I am glad that there wasn’t a cliff nearby.

In his very first sermon, all six sentences, Jesus made it clear that his own ministry was to people on the margins, people in the shadows, people in need. And if we are not those people, Jesus has a message for us too. He says:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.¹

If we are not the people to which Jesus ministers, we are called to join him in ministering to the needs of others. We are not all people on the margins, or in the shadows, or in need. The hometown crowd assumed Jesus was there to minister to them and when he told them otherwise, they wanted to throw him off a cliff.

There is a tendency to see ourselves in the little guys of our Bible stories, in the oppressed, in the victims, in the ones being led to freedom, or slaying the giant, or being made whole. But we aren’t – at least not all of us or all of the time. And when we’re not the oppressed ones or the victim, Jesus expects us to be the ones ministering to them, just as he does, instead of feeling angry or slighted that we’re missing out on some of his attention. And certainly not feeling ready to throw someone off a cliff for expecting this of us.

There will absolutely be times in our lives when we will be the ones who need ministering to. And there will be times in our lives when we need to

¹ Luke 7:27-31, NRSV

be ministering to others, to those on the margins, or in the shadows, or in need. Real maturity of faith is knowing the difference.

Know that *you* are loved of God and share that love with those who need it. If necessary, use words. Amen.