

Feb 2, 2025

Pr. Steve

Texts: 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; Luke 4: 21-30-

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is a most baffling text for the day, isn't it? Here Jesus comes to his hometown. Then he gave his first sermon. You know—the crowd's rooting for him, right? *'He's one of ours. Show us your stuff.'* (It's like Louis [Moehlmann] at his Ordination today in North Dakota, right?) The whole congregation there is expecting good things. They love this guy. And two minutes later, they're saying, *'Let's kill him!'*

That's why people don't get the Bible.

What is going on? Usually this hinge verse is translated, *'He spoke with gracious words and the people admired him.'* And how do you move from that to *'Let's kill him'*? Two scholars more recently (I mean this has been centuries, friends, of people not understanding) two more recent scholars really I think have broken through, and found in that verse in the text what it really says is *'He spoke to them and they were astonished.'*

Now, the beautiful thing about that word, *astonish*, is it has two meanings, doesn't it? To be astonished can be, *'Wow! or 'Oh my God!'*

He threatened them, he alarmed them, he terrified, he horrified them because he spoke only of God's grace—for the Gentiles. Jesus literally cuts off Isaiah's passage mid-sentence. The last part of it that we just heard, *"and I'm here to proclaim Jubilee Liberation for all the oppressed"*. And he refuses to say, *"and a day of vengeance for our God."*[Isaiah 61:2b]

*'Cuz that's our strong suit, isn't it? vengeance we're really good at, and don't you dare leave that part out!'* This is serious. And they got his message, but they weren't foggy. They are outraged that he speaks only of God's mercy because they were a fiercely nationalistic, people, too. Mmm. *'Fortunately, that kind of thinking is gone in our day. I mean I don't even know which country is number one anymore, do you?'* And that's all we talk about. That's so shallow. So shallow.

And then to add insult to injury, Jesus continues. *'Oh, and have you forgotten that back in Elijah's day there was a great famine through the land and Elijah fed nobody except the widow from Zarephath, a pagan Gentile.'* [Luke 4:25] Oh, and in Elisha's day, leprosy was everywhere, but Elijah only healed Naaman, the Syrian. [Luke 4: 27]

Why does he just keep going? Because he's trying to break through to us. It wasn't just the hometown crowd in Nazareth who, *'you know, wasn't all that sharp—probably illiterate, you know'*. No, two thousand years later, the Church doesn't want to get it that the mercy of God is for all and everyone. Now. The only thing it takes to qualify is that you cast a human shadow.

Oh my! This is his opening sermon at his ordination—his keynote, his keystone, his mission statement—and what is to become the church's Mission Statement. This is our commitment in a world gone crazy with vengeance. He says, '*No more.*' Jesus is all about the non-violent coming of God.

For the first two centuries, the Christian Church [members] were pacifists. But then, we got beyond that stage—doing everything to justify war. Saint Augustine [argued] a Just War theory, which makes no sense in an age of slaughter. No sense—because violence and war go nowhere. They may provide a brief spate in which to recover or shut something down, but always violence and war are sowing seeds for the next acts of violence and war. Always, that's why they keep going.

A beautiful summary of Jesus' work is the phrase, '*My enemies are my guests.*' Try that as a mantra this week. Seriously, we've been putting it off for two thousand years, you know. '*Our enemies are our guests.*' And that's extremely demanding because that means we have to do all this work—for changing, and healing, and reassessing, and being grounded in a spirit that does not float around the planet. It comes only through the mercy and reconciling compassion of God. It's about healing us. '*Let me point you to the highest gifts. If there is no love—no matter how great our sacrifice, no matter how great our intention—when there is no love, it's just a gong booming, cymbals clashing, crashing.*'

[1 Corinthians 13: 1]

You see any of that in the news this week? Endless commotion, clashing, crashing. Nothing making sense anymore. Uh-huh. That's why this is so important. '*Our enemies are our guests.*'

So, in the spirit of partnership, three core things. One, our friends, (as Karl [Pfeiffer] mentioned) in both contexts, Nicaragua and South Africa, have been through incredible brutalities in decades previous. Slaughter we cannot imagine, and it has come with great consequence, and it's not over. It is seeping into the next generations. But they've also attained a wisdom in the midst of that. And we need that wisdom these days. We need it. We need it.

[Two], And they have, in the midst of all of these struggles, and in these post-Apartheid days, come into a place where many people now have a sense of dignity, and self-respect—which has been denied them for a lifetime. '*You're nobody, you don't count, you're invisible. The whole of Africa is just a dark spot, isn't it, on the map? Who cares? Nobody talks about Africa in America.*' And they have found the roots essential for becoming human beings through their faith—and we need to share in that with them too.

Because our propensity right now is resignation. '*How much more of this can we take my God? It's almost two weeks now and we're just— I'm done. You know what I mean? Move on. Hope it'll go away.*'

We need them. We need their truth-telling. And [three] we also need this most surprising and amazing gift—of Joy and the Celebration of Life—and their willingness to acknowledge everything that discourages and shuts us down. But— that's not the whole

picture. They learned that [when] there would seem to be the end of the world. It was only the end of the world as they knew it, because something new is always breaking in through God's mercy —always. But it's being in touch with it that matters.

And so the singing, and the laughter we shared. And one of the things the delegation could never get over, is how much every day with our friends in Lwamondo, day in, day-out, constant laughter. Not avoidance, not escape—enjoying the fullness of life. It's impossible to share.

That's why we need each other in this Body of Christ.

And what it is dedicated to—is the practice of Mercy and Reconciliation without end. Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sources:

The Non-Violent Coming of God James W. Douglas

My Enemy Is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke. Josephine Massyingbaerde Ford