



God Is Greater Than Our Prejudices
Luke 4:21-30

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, Sunday, February 3rd, 2019
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
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Text: "Yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow of Zarephath in Sidon." (v. 26)

All of us have prejudices. Now we do not like to admit it, but we do. Prejudices are preconceived notions that are based on limited facts at best. It is "knowing" what you do not know. Years ago Sue and I experienced this first hand. Serving as youth ministers the music department had a preconceived notion of who we were, based *not on their experience with us, but upon their experience with our predecessors*. They could not see us as being just like them.

Prejudice is also based on the hue of our skin, our zip code, the schools we attend, and so forth. None of us are without prejudice. The problem with prejudice is not only that it is shallow but that it is misleading. A bigger problem is when we place upon God our own prejudices and bias.

Someone once said, "God made humanity in the divine image, and humanity returned the favor!"

That quip came to my mind as I reflected upon today's gospel. Picture the scene. Jesus returned to his hometown, Nazareth. As a "guest preacher" he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He read the assigned text for the day, Isaiah 61: 1 and 2.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Closing the scroll "all spoke well of (Jesus)" and were amazed at his "gracious words." No doubt, some remembered him as Joseph and Mary's little boy, the one that they brought to

the Temple; the one who was always asking questions. Now, they simply marveled. They may have even poked one another and nodded their approval.

But Jesus did not seek their accolades or approval. He wanted to drive home a point. He was never one to leave well enough alone. Realizing that they did not fully comprehend the significance of his words - "today this reading has been fulfilled in your hearing," Jesus reminded the congregation of who God is. Did they remember two of their own prophets, Elijah and Elisha.

In a time of a drought and famine, at a time when there were many widows in Israel - people who had no one care provide for them - God sent Elijah not to one of Israel's houses but to the house of the widow of Zarephath, a foreigner. It was in *her house that he performed a miracle feeding. Now, this got the congregation's attention.*

Jesus continued. At a time when there were many lepers in Israel, Elisha cleansed an foreigner, a Syrian general named Naaman. At this things turned ugly. The congregation grew angry and wanted to kill *this self-proclaimed prophet, this hometown boy, this son of Joseph, this Jesus. Just who did he think he was to push their narrow boundaries of God. "Blessed assurance, God is mine, not yours!"*

God does not share our prejudices. In the story of Jonah (which I am teaching in our midweek LOGOS program, *we read that when Jonah went on a pout God reminded him the Divine's compassion and care not just for those whom Jonah loved or liked, but for all of God's Creation, all of God's children. God was and is concerned with the plight of the foreigner, the alien, the lost, the last, and the lonely, even if they were not. This is a very hard pill to swallow. What God may see things differently than we do?! Impossible!, isn't it?*

Jesus was not setting down something new and unheard of. He reminds us God's command.

- *Exodus 22:21) "Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt.*
- *Exodus 23:9 "You shall not oppress an alien, ... for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.*
- *Leviticus 19:33-34 "'When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The stranger who lives as a foreigner with you shall be to you as the native-born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you lived as foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.*
- *Deuteronomy 24: 17-18 Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.*

Jesus reminded them that they were the “Chosen People” to care for all of God’s Creation. They were chosen for service not safety. And we, who take Jesus seriously, are “saved to serve.” With “privilege” comes “responsibility.” “God made humanity in the divine image and humanity returned the favor.”

God is not limited by our prejudices. God is a big god, not a small one limited by our likes and dislikes, preconceived notions and prejudices. Jesus, we are told, simply “passed through the crowd and went on his way.” (v.30) I believe that the Risen Lord still does that. Those who are blinded or constrained by their prejudices are simply “passed through” as the Risen Lord goes on his way--the way to Truth and Life.

When we pray “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” we are not giving God permission because God *n-e-v-e-r* needs permission. *Instead we are acknowledging that God’s will w-i-l-l be done on earth and we can either get on board or get run over.*

The sacrament that we are about to celebrate is about a Love greater than our prejudice. This is God’s act of Grace, not ours. The Table is not our table but God’s. It is God who issues the invitation through the clay vessel of human voice and speech. It is not a Table for the worthy but for those who recognize their unworthiness. It is open to all, not the few. At the Table we touch and taste Good News.

Amen.