

***"The Truth That They Need To Hear"***

The Gospel today is a continuation of the Gospel from last week, Luke Chapter 4, which is a story or account of Jesus' going home to Nazareth. He read in the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath. He read from Isaiah 61 – which explains the mission of God's anointed one – the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus boldly proclaimed after this reading, as He sat down to teach, which is the way that Rabbis taught in the first century. They would read the Scripture standing up but would teach sitting down. Jesus said that *"today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* The people in the synagogue that day were amazed by the manner in which Jesus spoke, because He spoke with great authority. I told you last week that I, probably like a whole bunch of other folks originally thought that the people got angry because Jesus said, *"today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* But that is not why they got angry.

Things started to turn pretty quickly as we read in today's Holy Gospel. They started out speaking kindly about *"Joseph's son,"* but then began to question how Joseph's and Mary's Son, one of their home-grown sons could be the Messiah? Then Jesus told them about His concern for their spiritual health, and He stated God's desire to help the Gentiles as well as the Jews. This is where things took a 180 degree turn! They got angry, I mean absolutely furious - and mean too. Jesus answered their questioning by saying: *"Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.' 'I tell you the truth,' he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his hometown.'"* (Luke 4:23-24) Jesus was hitting them right between the eyes – pretty much calling them the same thing as John the Baptist called the people, *"You brood of vipers!"* Jesus was putting the people of Nazareth on the spot, because all they could think of was the young son of Joseph and Mary, and they couldn't see who was right in front of them, Jesus, the Man, the Messiah, the Son of God!

Jesus could of course, sense their opposition and huge lack of faith, and so He pointed out two occurrences in Holy Scripture in which God used His prophets to minister amazing feats, amazing acts of grace to Gentiles while Israel was steeped in unbelief. In today's Holy Gospel Jesus refers to Elijah, the prophet who went to heaven on a fiery chariot from the Jordan River. He took the time to minister to the widow in Zarephath, in Sidon. Listen to what happened to Elijah and that widow from 1 Kings 17:10-14 *"So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, 'Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?' 'As she was going to get it, he called, 'And bring me, please, a piece of bread.' 'As surely as the LORD your God lives,' she replied, 'I don't have any bread--only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it--and die.' 'Elijah said to her, 'Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.' 'For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the*

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*land.* You can assume since the heavens had not opened that there had been a 3-year drought. What happens when you have a drought? What happens to crops? They don't grow! They didn't have crop insurance in those days. They relied on what they grew to eat. They felt abandoned and ready to die. That's why she said I am going to go home and make what I can and then me and my son are going to die. Miraculously, the jar of flour and the jug of oil did not run out – BUT – the widow's son died. So what did Elijah do? Elijah took the young man, carrying him to an upper room and laid the boy out, then he laid on top of him calling out to the Lord God. God restored the boy's life. The people of Nazareth were asking – why the Gentiles? Aren't we "the Apple of God's Eye?" Aren't we God's chosen people? The temperature was starting to rise in the synagogue that day.

Then Jesus added to that and He told them about the Prophet Elisha, the man that had been Elijah's apprentice. The Prophet Elisha and how he was called by God to minister to Naaman the Syrian leper, who just happened to be the commander of the enemy army. A Jewish servant girl of Naaman's wife told them that if he would see Elisha in Samaria then he would be healed. So Naaman got his king's permission and he went to speak with the king of Israel. Naaman brought enough riches so he could to "buy" his healing. He got to Elisha's house and Elisha didn't go out to talk to him, but he sent a messenger to tell him *"Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."* But Naaman went away angry and said, *"I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy."* (2Kings 5:10-11) He did not want to do this – but eventually he gave in. *"So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy."* (2 Kings 5:14) He tried to give the riches to Elisha, but Elisha couldn't be bought and neither could God – and it was refused. Here was another example of a Gentile – an enemy of Israel - being healed by the mercy of God Almighty.

Jesus' talking of Gentiles rather than Jews having God's blessing – that's what caused the irritation of the people of Nazareth. The temperature was past the boiling point and they started to go wild. Today's Gospel says, *"All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way."* (Luke 4:28-30) I want you to picture this. Here is an unruly crowd who wants to kill Jesus. He just walks right through. God was present. God was walking through, after all – we know who Jesus is. You know – like parting the waters – the crowd just moved away and Jesus was able to walk through. They had no power, no authority – it was all with Jesus.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, Jesus went directly to the Jews; but they rejected Him; He told them of Gentile's participation in the kingdom; and so some Jews wanted to kill Him. They eventually did – but Jesus was not killed until the proper time, when He chose to die, willingly. I find it it amazing that they took Him to the edge of the cliff – but Jesus miraculously walked

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right through the crowd untouched and unscathed! It was NOT His time to die. God was totally in control of the situation! The Gospel tells us that Jesus returned to Capernaum, where He preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath and people were amazed at the authority in which He spoke. Are we surprised? Why? God was speaking to them in the flesh! But so many of them did not know that until it was time.

The suffering servant-Messiah that Isaiah spoke about in Isaiah 53, 58 and 61 did not come to punish the nations. Remember, any time you hear the word “nations” in the Bible it is referring to the Gentiles – the non-Jews. God did not send Jesus, His Messiah to punish the Gentiles - but to bring God’s love and mercy to them. Do you know what mercy means? Mercy means NOT getting what you deserve! God gives you a precious gift – He doesn’t give you everything you deserve – instead He gives you salvation, He gives you eternal life. This message was, and remains shocking to them – it was not what they were expecting. Isaiah says that the Messiah was sent to be a light to the Gentiles. They read it, they knew it, but they just didn’t get it! And so Jesus was reminding them of that, and what did it do? It infuriated them! They wanted to kill Jesus – this hometown boy – they wanted to do away with. Jesus’ announcement that He was reaching out with healing to all people was not what most first-century Jews wanted to hear or expected. Jesus combined it with severe warnings to His own neighbors and the people of Israel. They needed to abandon their hopes that the Messiah would ride in on a white horse and abolish every enemy that they had – militarily. It didn’t work that way. The Romans and the Syrians, ironically, not all that long after Jesus died on the cross - in 66 AD - Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans; the Temple was torn down – their beloved Temple was left in ruins! By 70 AD everything else in the city was gone! Jerusalem was no more. Jesus was not worried about their reaction to His words – He just spoke the truth – that they needed to hear!

It is quite possible that when you read, study, and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others – you could get that very same reaction. You may have heard some say to you, “I don’t want to hear about Jesus,” or “I don’t want you to talk about Jesus”? or the infamous “I want to be your friend, but let’s not bring religion into this.” Have you heard the old saying? “The two things you don’t talk about with friends are religion and politics!” You will find people who are entrenched in other beliefs, and driven more by the culture of the day – (we have experienced that) and they will have their interests and agendas challenged by the good news of Jesus Christ and His surprising grace. If mercy is not getting what you deserve – grace is what you don’t deserve – but receive anyway – because of God’s love. God’s promises are not always received with open arms – but we can pray for others to be changed, to be blessed by the Holy Spirit, and for them to welcome Jesus into their hearts. We can ask Jesus to help us share His truth with others – the truth that they need to hear.

We had two men’s funeral/memorial services yesterday and Friday. Neither one of these men were afraid to talk about Jesus and the effects that He has had on them. They were certainly not “lukewarm Christians” – neither one of them were perfect. Just look at the altar – a result of Rowan’s love for Jesus – and each one here. Both Warren Minchew and Rowan Evans knew Jesus and were not afraid to let anyone know. The older we get the more evidence we have to

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share about God's working in our lives. This should be something we would want to share without hesitation - to anyone – Jew or Gentile. Why is it that we can tell our friends about the great movie we saw last night, or the great TV show – but we have a problem telling people about our best friend, the One who has done more for us than anyone. Think about that. This is something we should want to share with anyone – Jew or Gentile. It is a simple introduction, that is all it is, to someone special to you and the amazing things that Jesus has done for you. I promise that if you do that the door will be opened and you let God do the rest. Listen to these words of Jesus in Revelation 3:20. He says "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*" My friends, that is the truth that we need to hear – and share.