

21 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.

23 Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

24 “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy^a in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 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 off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. 32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

Rage Room

What do you do when you get angry? Some people throw things. They’ll admit, “It’s therapeutic.” In fact it’s so common that a new business has been built around anger called the Rage Room. It’s a place where you can vent your anger by destroying things with a sledge hammer, baseball bat, or golf club. Once upon a time people would simply go office space on the old printer or computer out back but now you need a special room, safety equipment, and you have to pay for it. But not everyone expresses anger in the same way, some are throwers and some are hoarders. Some vent outward and express their anger, others bottle it up and take it out on themselves. Anger may be all the rage but it can have a destructive and negative impact on mental health. It’s not always a good thing. It’s not always healthy. Occasionally it is the proper response. When Jesus got angry he threw out the money changers and overturned their tables.

But in our lesson Jesus takes the place not of thrower but throw-ee. Those gathered in the synagogue of Nazareth are so enraged that they have to throw something or someone: Jesus. Why were they so upset? What has made them so angry? It was the scandalous nature of God’s grace for all people.

Last week Jesus preached the second shortest sermon ever. Jonah’s sermon comes in as the shortest. Short sermon but Nazareth doesn’t react as expected. They thought, “Jesus missed all the good parts of Isaiah 61. Where’s the judgment? Where’s the wrath? You missed the part telling us

how the Gentiles would serve us and work in our fields.” They were upset but not quite ready to throw Jesus off a cliff. Our lesson picks up with, “*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.*” The NIV makes it sound like everything is hunky dory with Jesus but the same word for speak well of (witness well of) can also be speak against (Dative of Advantage or Disadvantage) and being amazed at the gracious words can equally be “I’m amazed he actually said that.” This word for amazed also happens to be a different word for amazed when Jesus moves on to Capernaum vs. 32. At this point their thinking, “Who is this Jesus? Isn’t he the son of a dumb carpenter.” They knew Joseph and Mary, that family. Mary was the girl who left on vacation without her husband and returned pregnant. Joseph should have stoned her for that! And now he thinks he can call himself the Messiah?

What enraged them, what got their blood boiling to the point of wanting to throw Jesus off a cliff, comes next. Jesus suggests that God’s favor rests on those outside Israel – the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian – and not their own widows and lepers. “*Undoubtedly you will speak to me this parable, Physician, heal yourself (attend to one’s own defects before those in others.) Do here what you’ve done in Capernaum. 24 “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.*”

Jesus reminds Israel of her history. Jesus first provides the example of a woman. In their day and age she already has one strike against her. She also happens to be a Gentile and poor. That’s strike two and three. They would have considered her outside of God’s love and favor. Then there is Naaman also a Gentile, as well as a commander of an oppressive army in opposition to God’s people and above all, he’s a leper. Three strikes - cursed by God, outside of Israel, unclean, and evil. You would think that Israel would have the inside track on miracles, but that was not the case these were outsiders, enemies of Israel even. Jesus points out that these two - received healing and grace over everyone in Israel.

Just as Elijah and Elisha were not recognized as true prophets from God by the Israelites of their day, so also Jesus is not recognized as being the One sent by God by the Jews of his day. A place of peace, a place where God’s Word is proclaimed, and peace is preached is filled with rage when they should have received his words with joy. They demonstrate their rejection by taking him up a hill in order to stone him. Sometimes you throw stones at people at other times you throw people at stones and then rain down more stones. They rejected Jesus and Jesus moved on.

What makes you angry? Jesus comes to us in his Word and maybe it's not so much that grace goes to those unworthy of it, but rather that God expects obedience to his Word. Maybe it's what he says that is counter-culture such as lifestyle choices, taste of music or movies. Maybe we don't like what God has to say about living together outside of marriage. Or that it doesn't matter how sweet and loving your grandma may be if she is outside of Christ, she is in very real danger of hell.

But we may not like that, it may upset us, so we'll just throw Jesus out and ignore that portion of his word. So often we refuse to see and hear Jesus for who he is. Jesus should move on for all of our rejection. But maybe we don't see it that way. Maybe we see ourselves as having the moral high ground - better than those around us. If that's the way we see it we are no different than those in Nazareth. Are we so certain? Paul reminds us in Romans that there is no one righteous, no one who does good. *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* You and I are no more worthy of God's grace than the addict down the road. If there is one thing that joins all people alike it's that all people are sinners.

For us to think we can hold our heads a little higher, because we're a little better, because we have a monopoly on God's grace, Jesus should walk right on through us and take his faith with him. Don't think it can't happen. The Bible is full of warnings of falling from the faith. Even Saul, the Lord's chosen and anointed king fell from faith. The gospel keeps moving and it could leave you too.

While Jesus moved on from Capernaum, he's not done with Nazareth. Even after rejection it seems he returned. The other gospel accounts of Jesus in his hometown are placed near the end of his ministry. His disciples follow him. They're similar but I'm not so certain they're the same. Jesus isn't dragged off to a cliff to be killed he is simply rejected and the one who is amazed is Jesus - who returned to the place where they tried to kill him.

That's the sheer grace of God. There isn't anything they've done, in fact you could say that they taunted him. They mocked him. They tried to kill him because the sinful nature would rather die under the law (I can do it all by myself mentality) than be given something for free. But that's the message Jesus came to announce, "Freedom for captives." What can a captive do to gain his freedom unless someone has set them free? What can the blind see unless sight has been restored to them? Nothing but that's the healing Jesus came to bring. He truly was a Physician healing every disease and sickness. Jesus never used his miracles for his own benefit. They were always for others as evidence to his words, that what he had to say was from God. But for now his time had not yet come and he again displays his power by walking through the raging crowds seeking to destroy him.

The time would come when he would allow them to take him captive, when they would again taunt him, *"He saved others but he could not save himself."* There Jesus would suffer the sins of all both of those who reject him as well as those who receive him. He would suffer separation from his Father in heaven, feel the full force of hell, so that you and I would never have to. Jesus would die but not

here, not now in Nazareth. For now he reveals himself to people who could care less about him, those who reject him, mock him, insult him and try to throw him off a cliff. Later he will even die for them.

Jesus has not left you behind either. For all the times we've thrown out his Word or his son he still forgives. He gives forgiveness freely to all who would receive it. He attaches his promise to his word and his sacraments. He doesn't make it a difficult thing for us to do. In fact he does everything to point out this is free, apart from you, by grace.

He comes to us in his Word, he forgives our sin. And yet the little Naaman inside of each of us wants to walk away because it's too easy, the water back home is cleaner, it just doesn't look like much. Sometimes we expect Elijah to stand before us and put on a who, pay a large amount of money, struggle and suffer but if these works really did as much as we thought - we wouldn't need help in the first place.

But grace is freely given. It looks like Jesus dying on the cross for you. God worked salvation for you. If God joined his word to the muddy water of the Jordan river - sign me up. But you get even more! You are baptized. Not just plain water. God has joined his Word to the waters of baptism. You are baptized. You can't pay for it. God has already picked up the tab. The gospel isn't for sale it's freely given.

You and I don't deserve this anymore than anyone else. That's why it's called grace - undeserved love. So how can we thank God for all the grace and mercy he has freely given us? Listen to his Word. Obey his commands. Give thanks to God that he has given you this gospel. Live as the son or daughter that you are by faith. If you are rejected, if you are taunted, if people try to throw you off a cliff - it's okay to move on. In fact it's probably wise to do so. The Gospel keeps moving and there are many who still have not heard, who do not know.

Maybe you'll find them at the local Rage Room, if and when they ever come to Lodi. In the meantime if you need to break something or just feel like taking your aggression and anger out on something, we have plenty of mulch to move and grass to mow. It can be beneficial and I hear it is even therapeutic. But even greater than anything we can do is to contemplate the God who came to be tossed around for you and me. He came and overthrew the devil's work, our sinful nature, bringing freedom and healing to those who can't help themselves. This is our God who is for you. Amen.