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Good News, Good Riddance

Luke 4: 14-30

Luke 4:14 is the beginning of the adult ministry of Jesus. ¹⁴*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.* ¹⁵*He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.*

When Jesus began his ministry in Capernaum and Bethsaida and the other towns around the Sea of Galilee, he was knocking it out of the park! Preaching, healing, casting out demons... and what was the verdict of the Galileans? "...everyone praised him!"

But notice... what are the very next words in the text? "But then..." Okay, those words aren't really in there, but they ought to be because Luke is about to make a huge transition. He goes from Galilee where everyone praises Jesus, to Nazareth—his home town—where they try to kill him. There ought to be a musical cue. [Cue happy music] "He taught in synagogues of Galilee and everyone praised him..." [Cue Scary Music] But then... (Read 16-21)

Last week, we looked at Jesus' first recorded sermon in Luke taken from the prophet Isaiah. Remember the very last words in Isaiah's text? "...the year of the Lord's favor." What one describes that phrase? Jubilee! Every 50 years came the Year of Jubilee. That year, every slave was set free, every debt forgiven, if someone in your family had sold your land, it was returned to you! It was like pressing a giant reset button! And since Jesus was speaking to people who were living in that moment in bondage under the Romans, the idea of Jubilee—of freedom—must have seemed sweet ...but impossible!

But then, Jesus sat down to preach. What did he say? "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!" In other words, Jesus claims that **He** is God's Jubilee. In **Him** the poor and the afflicted and the heartbroken and the blind and the prisoners find good news. That's quite a claim for a kid from Nazareth. How did they respond?

At first, the Nazarenes are amazed at Jesus' words, but slowly their mood changes. They become curious. And then they become angry. And then they become murderous and are ready to throw Jesus—their Jesus, their hometown boy—right off a cliff. Wow!

Anyone here ever tried to share your faith with family or close friends? Did it feel dangerous? They may not have tried to throw you off a cliff, but witnessing to family may be the hardest evangelism we will ever do. And yet, because we love them, we want to share Jesus with them, right? So, how do we do it and what should we be prepared for? Jesus has a few suggestions from his trip back to his hometown.

First, walk your talk. If you are going to witness to your family, you had better walk your talk! What is the hardest thing about sharing with family and close friends? You know each other too well! You know all their “stuff,” don’t you? And they know you know all their stuff. And they can get defensive and feel judged by you. Right? What is even harder, they know all **your** stuff, right? Your moods, your peculiarities, your screw-ups... every stupid thing you’ve ever done. They know about it!

So, if you begin to talk to your family about how Christ has changed your life, made you a different person, given you new direction and purpose... they are going to know right away whether you are blowing smoke or not. You may be able to con those who don’t know you well—use Jesus talk and quote Bible verses and preach at those on the edge of your life—without actually living like a Christian.

But if you start preaching to your family—and they can’t see any change between the old Mark and the new Mark—how far do you think you’ll get? I know people like that. Their lives are such a mess in every way but they try to witness to their family and friends as if they have it all together spiritually.

Look at our story. Why do you think that Jesus didn’t begin his ministry in Nazareth? Because they knew him too well. And remember... Jesus is the only person ever who did not sin. They didn’t have any “dirt” on him. No nasty secrets. They just knew him too well. He grew up there. They changed his diapers. Jesus had to get out of Dodge to begin his ministry. It was only when he began to develop a reputation—when word began to spread about his ministry in Galilee—that he was ready to come back home and share. Even then, it didn’t go very well, did it? But at least his reputation outside of Nazareth opened the door to his own family and friends. What is your reputation with your family? Have you earned the right to be heard? Do you walk your talk?

Want one tip on how to? Verse 16. “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom...” One of the most effective ways to walk your talk with your family is to go to church faithfully. Every week. Listen, if ever anyone could say, “You know, I really don’t get much out of church—the sermons don’t feed me, the worship isn’t to my liking”—it was Jesus! How hard must it have been for him to sit through bad sermons? After all, he wrote the Bible! How hard must it have been to sit through half-hearted singing when, while he was in Heaven, he had received the worship of

angelic choirs. If ever there was anyone who could say, "I don't need church to worship God," it was Jesus.

But he never did. It was his custom to be in church. If you are a Christian parent but don't make church a priority for your family—if you attend only if the weather is lousy or if there's no football game—what kind of witness is that to your kids? If you are a teenager, asking your folks to take you to church Sunday after Sunday may be one of the most effective ways for you to walk your talk in front of your family. And for you who say, "I can't come to church this weekend, I have guests from out of town." What a missed opportunity! Bring them with you! And if they won't come, tell them that worship is a priority for your family, give them an extra bagel, and tell them you'll see them in two hours.

If you are going to have a witness to your family and closest friends, you must walk your talk. You must live a life that is increasingly consistent with what you are saying. I am **not** saying that you have to be perfect before you ever talk about Jesus. But I am telling you that if you say one thing about Jesus and live an entirely different life, no one can sniff out that hypocrisy like your own people. And your witness to them will be D.O.A. It has been said that there are five gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and you. And most people will only read one of those. What do your family and friends "read" in you? Walk your talk!

Here's a second thing Jesus teaches about witnessing to family and friends: **Watch for the moment!** Jesus didn't walk into the synagogue and say, "Okay, now that I've made a name for myself as a great preacher, sit back and let me wow you." What happened? They asked him to speak, and when the invitation came he was ready! If you want to be used by God to share with your family and friends, pray for and watch for the moment to speak, and then do so. Don't jam your witness into your agenda. Look for God's.

I am **not** saying that you must wait until your family says, "Please tell us about Jesus." For how many here is religion the last topic to come up at the family dinner table? You might be waiting a long time for that invitation. But there will come times—when a family friend dies, when a tragedy strikes the nation, when someone struggles with shame, when a public religious figure does something stupid—and the door will open for you to speak hope or pray or defend true Christianity. If you are willing to be used by God to share a witness with those you love... pray. Ask God to give you the opportunity, and then... **watch for the moment.**

I realized this summer that I have unsaved family members that I am not even praying for! Shame on me. So, as part of my own *Year of Good News*, I have begun to do so. Every day. I lift up to God certain family members by name, and offer to be used **in his timing** to share Jesus with them. And now, I am watching for the moment. If such a moment came for you, would you even see it? And if you did,

would you have the courage to seize it? Or do you have a case of perpetual lockjaw when it comes to Jesus?

Walk your Talk, Watch for the Moment. And here's a third thing we learn about our family: They Needed Saving. When you read this story, did it strike you as a little extreme that they tried to kill Jesus? I've had people who didn't like my sermon. Every week, I'm sure. I've never had anyone who wanted to throw me off a cliff after church. Or at least, I'm not **aware** of anyone like that. (Anyone? Of course, that's what security personnel are for!) What happened in Nazareth that morning? They went from being "amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips" to trying to kill him. What did he say that made them so mad?

He said, "You need saving." Jesus referenced two Old Testament stories. The first is Elijah's encounter with a widow. A famine gripped the land and Elijah was hungry. He came to a poor widow who had only enough flour for one more meal. In fact, her plan was to eat her last meal... and then die. Isaiah says, "Don't be afraid. Make me a cake, and then God will take care of you." So, she did. She used the last bit of flour to feed Elijah. And then God performs a miracle. Her jugs of flour and oil never ran out until the famine was over. Now, why did the widow do this? Why did she give up her last bit of food for this stranger? Because, she knew she had a fatal lack of resources. If she kept the food for herself and her son, they would just die tomorrow instead of today. But if she trusted God's prophet, it might mean life for her. She was willing to take a risk because she knew she needed saving.

The second story is about the Syrian, Naaman, who had leprosy. He asked the prophet Elisha to help him. Elisha told him to take a dip in the Jordan River and Naaman was offended. Why should he wash in the muddy little Jordan River when he had plenty of big, clean rivers in Damascus? But his servant said, "What do you have to lose? Is not a little humiliation worth the possibility of a cure?" So out of desperation, Naaman did what Elisha said. Because he knew he needed saving! And he was cured!

Why did Jesus refer to these stories? And why did it make them so mad? Because this is what he was **really** saying: "My dear family and friends, I know you think you have it altogether spiritually. You are God's "chosen" people. You live upstanding lives. You take care of your family, your community, you go to Synagogue every Sabbath, you do all the right and proper things. But what I'm telling you is this: you still need saving! You need God's salvation. The widow knew she would die without God. The leper knew he would die without God. They both knew they needed saving. But you don't. You think you are just fine. And as long as you are convinced that you are "just fine" —that you don't need saving—you won't be saved." And this ticked them off!

One of the biggest hindrances to sharing Jesus with family and friends is we don't **really** believe they need saving. So many in Gig Harbor seem to have it all

together. Nice house, three nice cars, great jobs, right schools, right clubs, right activities. We forget that behind that facade are people who long to know God and experience his love... who are struggling with guilt and shame and disappointment.

And we also don't really believe what the Bible says regarding the next life, either—that apart from Jesus, our family will face eternity separated from God. We don't really believe it. In America, **everyone** gets to heaven... except for Hitler. If we knew that a thief was hiding in our parents' home, we would rush over to stop them from going in. If we knew our child was about to drink a glass with poison in it, we would knock it from their hands. If we were riding with our friend and he started to fall asleep, we would grab the wheel. Because we know that they need saving. Every person that matters to us—if they are without Jesus, no matter how things might appear on the outside—needs saving. Do you believe that?

Jesus did. He knew his family and dearest friends needed saving. And at the risk of his relationship with them—at the risk of his life—he was willing to say so.

Here's the final learning. Watch out for cliffs! They were so mad at Jesus they tried to throw him off a cliff. He got away, but it appears that Jesus never returned to Nazareth again. That's frightening, isn't it? It's the reason we don't dare share our faith with those we love... because it might kill that relationship. Or scar it. And—full disclosure here—that's a possibility! Jesus warned that following him might cost you close relationships. Cyndi and I know a young woman who accepted Christ and was disowned by her Mormon family. In Columbus, Ohio, a young Muslim woman recently converted to Christianity and had to flee her home because her father threatened to kill her.

We don't know for sure that Jesus' family was in the synagogue that morning. But we **do** know from other parts of the gospel that his own family rejected him. Even his mother didn't know what to believe about him any longer. At one point, they even thought he was crazy. But that wasn't the end of the story. When we turn to the book of Acts, we read in Chapter 1 about those who gathered in Jerusalem, waiting for the Holy Spirit to come, as Jesus had told them to do. Luke lists the disciples and then we read this: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." In the end, his family came to faith. Notice the patience of Jesus. He didn't pressure. He didn't push. He witnessed... and waited.

I cannot promise how your family will respond when you risk sharing Jesus with them. They may ignore you. They may reject you. They may try to throw you off a cliff. Or they might surprise you and—after a while—believe. But I can say that if you will live a life of consistency... if you will prayerfully watch for the right moment to speak and then have the courage to open your mouth... if you will be patient—not for days, but for years—God might use you to lead your beloved to Jesus. And I promise, it will be one of the greatest moments in your life.

So this morning, right now... who is one family member that you will begin to pray for every day, and be ready to speak when God gives you the moment?

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **READ** the passage out loud.
- **REFLECT & APPLY INDIVIDUALLY:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. Have you ever tried to witness to your own family or close friends? What happened? What do you learn from Jesus about this challenging responsibility?
 2. Why were the Nazarenes ready to kill Jesus? Does any of that apply to our culture today?