

“Recovery and Release”
 Isaiah 61:1-4; Luke 4:14-30
 Sunday, January 27, 2019
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If you do a Google search - - on the Bible text for this morning - - you get a *summary phrase or title* that describes the events in Luke - - that were just read. / It’s similar to looking it up in a book or commentary - - there’s usually a section of commentary on the text - - which is preceded by - - a title. / The MOST COMMON TITLE - - for this story - - is to call it:

“The REJECTION of Jesus - - at Nazareth.”

A FEW commentaries call it, “Jesus SERMON at Nazareth” - - which I prefer.

And you might say - - who cares?

Well - - if you care about interpreting and understanding the Bible - - it matters.

It matters because the way you SUMMARIZE something - - INTERPRETS it.

Is this a story about REJECTION?

OR - a SERMON - about RECOVERY and RELEASE from captivity?

They are NOT the same thing!

So - - which is more accurate - - you might ask?

Well - the story as told by Luke - DOESN’T MENTION - - rejection - until the very end.

In fact Luke tells us that the FIRST reaction - - to Jesus - - was PRAISE!

“Everyone spoke WELL of him” - it says - - & they call his words GRACIOUS!

This very thing is pointed out by Glenn Monson who has a new book on preaching.

They don’t REJECT him - - until they really UNDERSTAND him!

All this stuff about RECOVERY and RELEASE - - it all sounds good at first - - but it’s CHALLENGING - - when you really THINK about it - - and what it means.

So to really get at the difference between REJECTION on one hand - -

- - and RECOVERY and RELEASE on the other - -

- - let's look at the REASONS for the rejection.

WHY do people REJECT Jesus?

Reason number ONE - - I'll call - - CHANGE.

What Jesus is talking about - - is substantial CHANGE - - not just a tweak here and there.

Think about New Year's resolutions. / Are your resolutions about self improvement - - or are they about REAL change in your way of life? / The two are NOT the same. / And I think MOST of us prefer - - a little self improvement - - instead of CHANGE.

But the Gospel - - is NOT a guide to being better.

It's not a program for a happy life.

Instead - - it's about substantial LIFE change - - which comes from GOD.

The poor - - and the prisoners - - and the oppressed - - are set FREE!

They are RELEASED!

And their sense of SELF - - and VALUE - - is RECOVERED.

NOT - - by anything they DO - - but by God's GRACE.

But I think - - this kind of RADICAL change - - is SCARY.

And so - - I think - - it is REJECTED - - by the crowd - - when Jesus preaches it.

In the words of Karoline Lewis from Luther Seminary:

“Jesus' sermon in Nazareth is a life-changer”

Life change - - she says - - often demands DEPENDANCE on another - - and NOT our incessant insistence - - on in-dependence. / Life change - - as Jesus calls for it - - is not for the sake of improving ourselves - - but for the sake of uplifting someone OTHER than ourselves.

And - - she warns us - - against attempts to CHANGE our OWN lives - - in the ABSENCE of the ONE who changes lives.

But as I said, I think this is challenging.

And I think it is one reason why Jesus is rejected.

Ask yourself this:

What difference would it make to your faith if...

...you just substituted TODAY - - for TOMORROW or SOMEDAY.

A preacher named Janet Hunt asks the question this way:

“I wonder how my days would change if I simply treated every day as the TODAY we hear about. / And NOT just for ME - - but for the WORLD!”

What if TODAY our energy was directed toward: RECOVERY and RELEASE?

Release of people who are captive...

Recovery of sight and vision - - both physical and spiritual...

Freedom for the oppressed...

The things Jesus preaches about.

All of which brings me to my SECOND reason why I think - - Jesus was REJECTED.

The FIRST reason was because REAL CHANGE is more challenging than improvement.

The SECOND reason is - - all this stuff about - - PRISONERS and the OPPRESSED and the POOR. / That is the focus of Jesus sermon. / And I think that is - - a challenge to many people. / Unless you think of yourself AS - - OPPRESSED or POOR.

In an article called, “Visiting Prisons” - - Lauren Winner writes:

“I am writing this from the classroom of a women’s prison in central North Carolina. I come here each week to teach a course on prayer. / I never ask the students WHY they are in prison / They are there for all kinds of reasons - - some for life - - others unjustly.

And HERE comes Jesus - - quoting Isaiah - - proclaiming freedom for prisoners.

In America which - -

incarcerates a higher percentage of citizens than any other Western nation.

So here’s the question:

If discipleship as Jesus describes it is about proclaiming freedom for prisoners:

Are we?

It’s a challenging question for all kinds of reasons.

My point is that it is MORE challenging - - than many people are comfortable with.

The people in Jesus home town thought they KNEW him.

And we - - church people - - to some degree think - - we KNOW Jesus.

He’s familiar - - or so we think.

And then he says THIS!

And we have to ask: who are the poor he’s talking about?

Who are the captive - - the oppressed - - the blind?

It’s challenging stuff.

And so - - I think - - people reject it.

I think another reason Jesus is rejected is that he ADDS to this LIST!

As if the PROPHET Isaiah was not challenging enough...

Jesus adds foreigners!

People from Sidon - - and Syria.

As I thought about all this I came across an article about the Latino tradition of Epiphany.

“Three Kings Day” - - it’s called.

In Spain - - and parts of Latin America - including Cuba - - Christians celebrate this day.

Kids gather grass - - as if for camels.

And there is NO gift exchange on Christmas - - nothing until Epiphany!

The festival is all about - - welcoming strangers.

Imagine how celebrating Jesus in this way - - might change how we hear his words.

This is still the season of Epiphany according to come calendars.

The light of the star - - and the Magi - - shining in the January darkness.

Maybe the strangers - - the Magi from the east - - can guide us in this.

Anyone remember the movie: “Three Kings”

It was made in 1999 - - and starred George Clooney, Ice Cube, and Mark Wahlberg.

It is about the aftermath of the Persian Gulf war. / Four American soldiers set out to steal GOLD - - that was stolen from Kuwait - - but in the process they discover people who desperately need their help. / These soldiers are CONVERTED - - from their GREED - - to become people who are willing to sacrifice their own FREEDOM - - for the freedom of others.

Through their sacrifice - - they come to understand TRUE freedom.

That - - is substantial life change.

And it’s challenging to me - - to think about - - what that might look like in my life.

And it is why - - I think - - people rejected Jesus - - when he preached in Nazareth.

Recovery and Release sounds great at first - -

But it is sometimes Rejected - - when it is really understood.

A FOURTH reason I think it is rejected is that - - it’s OLD.

So reasons ONE, TWO and THREE - - why people reject Jesus were:

1. Real Change is difficult
2. Stuff about Prisoners, the Poor, and the Oppressed is challenging.

Unless you are one of them.

3. Same with Foreigners.

And number 4: all this is so OLD!

Isaiah was written 700 years before Jesus.

And the Gospel is 2000 years old.

So what does this have to do with us anyway!?

Times have changed - - since it was written.

Really?

Here's a response:

Jesus is not about the TIMES changing - - He's about changing US!

That's the response of a retired pastor named Walter Harms.

Think about the OLDEST thing in your home.

Think about ANTIQUES Road Show.

We ARE fascinated by SOME old things: the ones with VALUE!

Could it be - - that the MOST VALUABLE - - old thing we have - -

- - is this Bible - - and the word of Jesus - - quoting Isaiah.

As an example - - think of Sears. / Anyone still shop at Sears?

You all know that it nearly went out of business - - right?

There was an article in a recent Christian Century called: "What is Sears Worth?"

It claims that the fall of Sears - - is emblematic of a broader shift in capitalism.

The answer to today's dilemmas - - say the editors of the Century - - will NOT be found in NOSTALGIA - - for businesses like Sears - - NOR - - in an effort to simply maximize profits in the future. / Instead - - businesses need to help communities and help people to THRIVE.

How can we - - as people of faith - - live for:

“A DIFFERENT understanding of human WORTH - -

NOT determined solely by the market?”

It's a great question.

It's about substantial change - - in how we see things - - not just tweaking things.

Sure - - Sears just narrowly survived bankruptcy.

But the issue is still there.

Are there things about how we do business in this country - - that DEFORMS us?

Theologian Kathleen Turner thinks so in an article called:

“How Finance Capitalism Deforms Us”

That is what Jesus is preaching about:

How to Recover - - and be Released from - - things that DEFORM our souls.

Substantial change.

Life change.

I believe this is at the HEART of what Jesus was talking about.

It is why he lifted up this ANCIENT text from Isaiah.

Think - - of what we will LOSE - - if we don't RECOVER the heart of Jesus message!

As we do - - I'll end with these words from Maya Angelou.

She titles this: “No Loser, No Weeper”

And with respect for her - - I will nevertheless change the ending this morning...

“I hate to lose something - - then she bent her head.

Even a dime - - I wish I were dead!

I can't explain it - - no more to be said.

Cept I hate to lose something.

I lost a doll once and cried for a week.

She could open her eyes - - and do all but speak.

I believe she was took - - by some doll snatching sneek!

I tell you - - I hate to lose something.

A watch of mine once - - got up and walked away.

It had twelve numbers on it for the time of day.

I'll never forget it - - and all I can say is

I really hate to lose something.

Now if I felt that way about a watch and a toy...

What do you think I feel - - to lose the heart of Jesus - - His word of joy?

I ain't threatening you - - but as I said:

I really hate to lose something.

So - - how can we NOT lose the heart of Jesus challenging word?

How can we NOT reject it - - like the people of Nazareth did?

How can we proclaim Jesus word of - - RECOVERY and RELEASE - - to all?