

January 31 2016

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalms 71:1-6

I Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-32

Sermon *Getting Exactly What We Asked For*

Now I suppose there were cliff-hangers before the advent of radio, the advent of television and the advent of movies. And in the 19th century sometimes graphic novels in magazines would publish stories and books in installments so that the action adventures would leave you hanging, so to speak, until the next issue of the magazine or book came out. We are certain that there were cliff-hangers back in the days of movie series like the Perils of Pauline or others that where the hero or heroine would be literally hanging from a cliff until the next installment would be shown. Then of course television networks picked up on this when they left you hanging at the end of the production season of shows like Dallas and the episode of who shot JR? The same thing is done in more modern shows like Lost or Hero.

But our lesson from Luke's Gospel introduces us to a much earlier cliff-hanger of a different sort. Jesus had been invited, as was the custom in his day to read and to comment or talk off the cuff on the reading from the message for the day, from Isaiah chapter 61 verses one and two As a Jewish adult male he would be entitled to speak but the added twist was that this was the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth. So he would have been known by a good many people and that would have added, I think at least at the beginning to their comfort level in letting him to read and letting him speak to them that day. Yet by the end of the passage the same friendly home town crowd who had invited him to speak, had him nearly hanging over a cliff. Like the Perils of Pauline they were going to throw him off because they were so enraged at the things that he had said. The ending as we have seen was quite anticlimax that Carlie shared with us this morning. Jesus simply seems to fade into the crowd and miraculously walked away. What in the world had he done to raise his former friends, family, neighbors and maybe even some of his relatives to lead them to want to throw him off a cliff in anger? What could he possibly have said that lead the people he had grown up with from childhood to adulthood who must have seen some inkling of his special nature to be filled with rage. I think the answer lies in three different places; places where the synagogue congregation might have rightly expected of what Jesus gave them that day. And the three places are these-Jewish religious experience, human nature and greatly false expectations.

When Jesus chooses to make reference to the prophet Elijah and Elias he mentioned in his remarks to the people. It was something like throwing gasoline on

a fire. They are wonderful stories which contain great truths but they were about miracles that were performed outside of Israel and amongst all people, the Gentiles; which would have flown in the face of every red-blooded Israelite in what he or she had been taught about their faith. The congregation knew so well that the point of the story was to hold Israel accountable for her actions. You see the Israelites had been taught, for centuries and centuries of the chosen status that they had in God's eye. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses in the Exodus, God had chosen Israel for a very special purpose. But what had they done with their special purpose? Jesus had seen God's purpose in his time at least, become amongst the religious leadership a sense of entitlement, a sense of arrogance rather than a purpose of thoughtfulness and humility instead of the things that had happened time and time again in the years of the kings and the Old Testament prophets. Jesus said God might not only have wider aims beyond Israel for the Gospel and that God is no respecter of persons. God plant seeds, if necessary, wherever the seeds could be natured. This whole concept of the scriptures is flying in our faces as Christians as well and it goes against the very grain of our very human natures. Not only, we like the Jewish leaders of Jesus time, feel a sense of entitlement or special status because of our faith, our very human nature tells us that we want to be, what the world considers, to be on the winning side of every single argument. So we, too, want to put God in a sense in a box. Believing that God can only be on one side or the other of an issue or war or discussion or argument and of course that side is my side. I think I am safe assuming that what Jesus is saying to us, as well he was saying to his own Jewish brothers and sisters exactly what we might expect him to say, that God doesn't belong to anybody. The minute our arrogance because of our religious faith or even human nature that when we try to define what God is or what God is doing by our standards we libel be very wrong about our assumptions indeed. Well, so much for religious history and human nature.

But what about those false expectations that I mentioned earlier; how do they fit into the story? Well, the question the worshippers asked about Jesus is a telling question too. "Is this not Joseph's son?" The answer to the question speaks volumes about the fact that a 30 year old man is standing before them but in their minds, he has never changed, a man who would never grown out of his childhood. Yet wouldn't there be hope that he would have changed and grown and that he would develop a mind of his own and don't we hope and pray the same for our own children. In their minds he was the same person that they would have always known. And when, Jesus rocked their expectations, anger and frustration erupted in them. And that reminds us that not only do we have to be careful about putting God in box we have to be careful, also, about putting each other in boxes as well. Jesus I am afraid is telling us by saying, a prophet I think, is not accepted in his

own town but it is difficult and necessary thing for us to do as Christian brothers and sisters.

So the question remains can we let the past be the past, can you forgive, can we let people change and grow and can we let God be God working in the places, among people and situations that God considers is important. Can we avoid putting God and our neighbors in a box, and can we avoid putting Jesus over a cliff as we go about with our thoughts and actions. I think that our faith demonstrates we can but it is really not very easy at all because it takes some thought, it takes a lot of sensitivity, it takes a lot of diligence, it takes a lot of faith, but aren't these the very same things as we expect as we follow Jesus throughout the pathways of our lives.

Well it is a cliff hanger and we are not going to know until we see it how it works itself out. AMEN.