

Luke 4: 14-30

Have you ever heard a sermon that made you mad?

Most of us have.

Can you remember how that felt? What did you do? Talk to someone after? To the one who preached it? Or to others who were there?

Maybe you just went home and quietly fumed to yourself.

And during the sermon, what did you do?

Tune out, start reading the hymn book, or counting the floor boards, or say to yourself “I don’t have to sit here and take this” and vow never to darken the door again....

My husband Nate was a preacher himself, and if we were at someone else’s church and he didn’t like the sermon it was awful; he muttered, he sighed out loud, it was embarrassing.

Do you even sort of step back, even in your anger, and ask yourself WHY what the preacher is saying is angering you? Now: if you were in the congregation when Pat Robertson said that the people of Haiti are being punished by God for their sins....that’s one kind of anger. What would you do?

On the other hand, there are other kinds of anger.... is it possible that a sore spot is being touched, someplace vulnerable and maybe you need to hear what’s being said; maybe you’re being pushed to change, or to grow...?

It’s always a good thing, I find, to ask myself what exactly is it about a situation that is making me angry, and sometimes that leads to interesting self understanding. Is this righteous anger? Self-righteous anger? Is it resistance to something that I need to consider? Or is it justified anger at something that is harmful and dangerous?

So: What KIND Of things could a preacher say that would make you angry? What might I preach about that would make you mad?

One thing that is often sure to get people angry is a good sound Bible-based sermon on one of Jesus’ favourite topics: money. Jesus talked about it a lot.

And if I preached what the Bible teaches about giving to the church, - can you imagine? But don’t worry – I’m not going to do that today. I’m not going to preach about money. I’m *especially* not going to underline how Scripture teaches clearly and consistently that giving 10% of what you have is the basic minimum required. That 10% BELONGS TO GOD and you haven’t even begun to give of your *own* gifts until you’ve given over and above that. *And* I’m not going to preach, saying that people who say ministers shouldn’t talk about money just don’t know their scriptures.

I wouldn’t do that. People might get mad. :0)

Another thing that makes people angry is politics...and you could add others.

Today we are going to read about one sermon that made people so angry that they were ready to throw the preacher off a cliff. Really.

The preacher of course is Jesus. It's his first sermon in Nazareth. What a way to start out your ministry! He'd have never made it through the evaluations we put student ministers through today I can just imagine his supervisor's evaluation forms now.....

This is his home town. Nazareth. He has grown up there. People know him. Probably most of them knew him as a child, watched him grow. He goes to synagogue on Sabbath as he regularly did; stands up to read, and they hand him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Did he choose the passage himself, or was it the reading for the day/ We don't know. He reads it, says "today, this text has come true" and sits down.

And the people were SO impressed....they say "Isn't that Joseph's son?" Local boy makes good. They were proud of him. It's so very like a home town. And so is what followed.

He didn't quit while he was ahead, oh no. He couldn't just read that text and sit down. No. He preached a sermon. And by the end of that sermon, they were ready to throw him over a cliff. They were furious. What did he say? Do you remember?

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Did that make YOU mad? Me neither. What was it about that sermon?

It might help to know what the two Hebrew scripture references are about. (Jesus of course assumed that they knew the stories). Fir first example he gave is from 1 Kings 17...Elijah and the widow.

Read that whole chapter

And the second involves Elisha and Naaman....11 Kings 5: 1-14. (read it)

For today the point of the 2 stories that Jesus seems to be making...is that both this widow and Namaan were NOT Jews. Not part of the "chosen people". They were outsiders. God chooses to touch and bless those on the outside. And the task of those who are called to serve God, our task is to follow God, and to go to those outside the boundaries..outside the fold.

Part of what is happening here, I think is that we've been told that Jesus had been in Capernaum doing marvelous things. The people of his home town are eager to hear him for themselves, and to claim him , maybe even to take credit for him. And of course there had been rumblings about who he'd been associating with, because you know Capernaum was a city full of "those kind of people" – outsiders, those who didn't even contribute to the upkeep of the temple...It had a high population of non-jews...and I think that the people of Nazareth thought they should be on the receiving end of his miracles too, you

know? After all they were the ones who had invested in this kid as he grew up, they were the ones who helped keep that synagogue open so that he could learn and grow into the man he'd become...why shouldn't they get something, get some return for their investment? Is it possible they felt that by going to the outsiders, by spending his time with those people not even members, that he wasbetraying them in some way?

Jesus' sermon speaks to their attitudes about that. I don't want to be harsh with those people – what they were feeling was natural in some ways. But Jesus addresses it pretty straight on. If you think, he seems to say – if you think that ministry is about taking care of those who are like us, those who are on the inside, members,if you think that's what I came to do....think again.

The spirit of the lord is upon me because God has anointed me
To preach good news to the poor.
God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind
To set at liberty those who are oppressed
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Their expectations that THEY should be the ones who receive the good stuff from his ministry....he pretty much says Get over that.
The stories he tells make that clear. And he makes his point – and this is the killer – he makes his point from their own scriptures.

Here is what Fred Craddock has to say about it:

“Perhaps this accounts in part for the intensity of their hostility. Anger and violence are the last defense of those who are made to face the truth imbedded in their own traditions. Such truths will not go away even after the One who pointed to them has been removed. Those at war with themselves and what they know to be true, often make casualties even of those who seek their good. It is a common theme in Luke that the quarrel is not really between Jesus and Judaism, or between the church and the synagogue; the tension lies between the synagogue and its own scriptures.”

The should have known. They should have known better. They DID, in their deepest hearts and that's why they were angry.

He escapes, (it doesn't tell us how) but he doesn't leave and go elsewhere because he was rejected, so much as he was rejected *because he went elsewhere*.
They should have known. The Scriptures are FULL of the truth that God's love is for everyone. That God reaches out to people outside the fold...and if a choice is to be made, the shepherd leaves the sheep in the fold to go after the one on the outside.

What – if anything - does this say to a church facing a financial AGM? What if anything does it say to our budget decisions? Or what does this say to me, when I have to choose how to spend my time: for example, would you rather I spend my time here with you or

outside with others who aren't members or part of the congregation? To me, this text brings up our concept of membership. Membership. In UCC policy, unlike some other traditions, there are very few times when whether you are a member here, means anything practical. If I'm not mistaken, one is when voting on "hiring or firing" a minister, and one other time is voting on property issues, for example if we wanted to sell this building. Most other times we pride ourselves on being open – everyone is welcome. Right? Local congregations can make other bylaws though....so....what difference does membership make *here*, and when is it that we start thinking in those terms, how does that word and that concept function in the life of this congregation? I'm just asking.

We follow Jesus, who in the long tradition of his people and his scriptures reaches out to the ones who need him most....
Let's hear his words again

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.....