

“Will You Lift Him Up or Cast Him Down?”
Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; 1Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 4:16-30

01/24/16

Grace, Mercy, Peace and Life are yours from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

What, when and where is the setting of the Gospel reading for today? Jesus is very early in His ministry. In the first part of the 4th chapter of Luke Jesus had just been baptized and was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. Jesus was tempted after being baptized by the devil, among other places, on the temple in Jerusalem and afterwards went up to the region of Galilee where He taught in the synagogues and performed many miracles of healing. The text for today has Jesus in His hometown of Nazareth.

First, we have Jesus at His baptism, in Jerusalem being tempted, and then the cities of Galilee. Jerusalem is 18 miles west of the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized and not too far, I would assume, where He was in the wilderness for 40 days and nights. The devil took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem and tempted him (Luke 4:9). From there Jesus went to Galilee which would be 40-60 north depending on the specific location. Nazareth is approximately 40 miles north of Jerusalem. Capernaum is 15 miles northeast of Nazareth. Capernaum is considered Jesus' place of residency during His ministry and the home of the Apostle Peter.

In the text for today Jesus is in Nazareth, in a synagogue on the Sabbath, as was His custom. Did you hear this? Jesus was in a synagogue, their church, on the Sabbath as was His custom. Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, was in church on the Sabbath. That is not a bad example for us to follow, is it? If it is the right thing for Jesus to do, shouldn't we deem it right for us too? (Unless, of

course, you are SNOWED in as today.) Jesus knew His Father was present there. On this morning Jesus went into the synagogue and was given a scroll to read. What Jesus read was what was prescribed for the reading of that day. They had specific readings for their Sabbath, much like we have specific reading each Sunday in our lectionary.

Jesus was given one of the scrolls, unrolled it to Isaiah 61, read the first two verses, He sat down, with eyes fixed on Him (verse 20-21) and proclaimed, ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*** It is interesting that Jesus left out a portion of the text. He left out, ***“... and the day of vengeance of our God.”*** This may have been because “The day of vengeance” wasn’t fulfilled at that time but would be, and will be, on His final return.

Later in Jesus’ ministry He would have been accused of blaspheme in suggesting that Scriptures were fulfilled in the reading of this text because this passage was a Messianic Prophecy. Prophecy of the coming Messiah of Israel, of the world. After Jesus said, ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,”*** all who heard marveled at the gracious words that came from His month. It wasn’t until Jesus indicated that God intended to include Gentiles in His Messianic salvation that they rose up arms and wanted to cast Jesus off the precipice/cliff. Do you see a little irony here? The devil tempted Jesus by telling Him (Luke 4:9), “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you....’” The Jews seem to be working as the devil’s right hand wanting to cast Jesus down.

Are we any different than the Jews in the Gospel reading today? We love God when He is there performing miracles in our lives healing us when sick and providing for us in all our needs according to how we desire it and know it best. But, when God steps over the line and doesn't do as we see fit, then we want to cast Him down or out of our lives and from our presence. It certainly could happen in the Syria or Iraq situations with Isis. Could the Christians there, or across the world, say, "Jesus is not our God if He allowed this to happen to them, to us." In doing this, God's children, Christians, are taking Jesus to the top of the temple and testing Him or to the cliff and casting Him off. Or, the non-believers could easily say, "If your God is so loving why did He allow the beheadings to happen?" In this case, just as in the other, the non-believers are claiming Jesus/God is blaspheming, claiming to be almighty God but not performing or acting as if He is, therefore He must not truly be God so they are cast Jesus from their presence.

Do you think God is strange and wrong when those who are not believers, like you, seem to have all of life's cares provided as they live a life of opulence? Do we say or think, "Should so and so be forgiven since they are not good enough? You know, like me!" "Should that person be a member of our church? Heaven forbid, look at them and their life, no way! Look how they treated God and me for goodness sakes!" "God couldn't want them, right?" Wrong!

Jesus showed in His message today, that even the Sidonians, the Syrians, Isis, Moslems, Hindus, the Jews, the atheists are wanted in His house. That is, He wants them to receive the blessings of the cross too. He wants all people to receive the message of salvation and believe. Jesus is alive and well in your hearts! You know

Him as your Lord and Savior! He has and will continue to care for you in all your needs and whatever your situations in life. God also wants to be a part of the lives of those not of this fold, of His flock, whether red or yellow, black or white – whether American, African, Asian, Arab, Hispanic or Haitian. Everyone is precious and worth the sacrifice of Calvary to God!

If you will, God did the casting of His Son off the cliff. Jesus cried out (Mark 15:34), ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** God allowed Jesus to take the fall so you wouldn’t have to – so the world wouldn’t have to. Jesus survived the fall on Calvary, taking the plunge in death, so no one else would have to take the plunge to hell or off the precipice/cliff and lose their life because of their sins. Will you cast Jesus out of your life, from your presence, because His words, love and actions are not according to your will? Or, will you lift Him up and share Him with all? Let this be so!
Amen!