

January 26 Sermon

Luke 4:14-21. "Breaking Old Habits"

There are two things that can destroy our testimony for Christ! Complaining and grumbling. Why would the world want what we have if we aren't contented and joyful? ***If we are constantly complaining and grumbling, we give the world the wrong picture of the Christian life.*** We must get rid of our selfish and complaining habits if we want to show the world what it is like to live a contented and joyful life in Christ. Right?

Consider our passage this morning. Jesus is preaching in the synagogue. It's a wonderful sermon. He uses words from the prophet Isaiah to strengthen his position, ***"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind."*** Good news!

Their own son, Jesus coming home and preaching in his home church. The people are amazed at his gracious words, but they are troubled because they know who Jesus is. Jesus is in Nazareth. They know his parents and they watched Jesus grow up. And then the unthinkable. Jesus has now placed upon himself the Isaiah 61 scripture, declaring himself to be the prophesied servant that Isaiah spoke about.

The story ends with the response of the people in the synagogue of Nazareth. They do not take this message to heart. They do not reconsider their ways. They complain and grumble. It's hard to change old habits and old ways of thinking about a messiah, but Jesus is no messiah. They respond like Herod and Herodias. They try to kill Jesus. They rise in the synagogue and attempt drive Jesus out of town. They were going to throw him off the cliff, but Jesus passed through their midst.

If we do not recognize our habit of complaining and grumbling, we will fail to understand what God is offering to us. We get stuck in these old habits that we miss the point. We miss what is standing right in front of us. We think that we are prospering and have no need for anything. Unfortunately, we do not realize our spiritual condition. We fail to see that we are enslaved to sin. We miss that we are walking in darkness and are not having the life and the blessings that God wants us to have.

This is what makes Jesus' words ironic. It is usually the physically poor and physical oppressed and distressed that understand their need for a Savior. They are the ones who understand they are spiritually needy. Jesus teaches in the synagogue to help the people understand that they are spiritually needy. He uses the illustrations of Elijah and Elisha to show them that they have a spiritual deficit and need Jesus. Jesus attacks us where we do not expect him to attack us. We do not understand that we need Jesus to have the good life, to break the enslavement of sins, and to have eternal life given to us. We don't want to change.

Think about the parable of the evil tenants in Matthew 21: 33-46. Remember each time the owner sent someone to collect the rent, the tenants attempted to injure or even kill the messenger. Eventually, they killed the landowner's beloved son. The owner is God, the vineyard is Israel, the wicked tenants were the religious leaders, the mistreated servants were the prophets. The beloved son is Jesus.

Loving God involves a lifestyle of obedience. God expects his vineyard, the Church To become an accepting fellowship of obedience. We reject the claim of Jesus not because we misunderstand his teachings, but because we understand them all too well.

Or how about Nicodemus, a man on the border. A man who never really became a disciple of Jesus. Did he? How did Jesus affect him? Do you think he ever forgot the night when he laid aside his work for the Sanhedrin, turned down the lamp, and went out under the stars to ask the man from Nazarene questions? We know Nicodemus remembered. On two occasions we know he championed the cause, but he could not bring himself to openly acknowledge. He stood up in the Sanhedrin and spoke a good word for Jesus. It took courage, and he did it. No complaining and no grumbling about Jesus.

He must have seen Jesus die, for he was there to assist in lifting down the broken body of Jesus from the cross. He helped Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus, the one who challenged him. There were many things he could have done.

Jesus. What pressure he must have been under to conform to the hopes and desires of that adoring crowd. He chooses instead to preach the unvarnished truth, and in so doing he not only disappoints them but angers them.

The good news is proclaimed to us that we can be free from Satan. We can be free from the broken life. Jesus has come offering to heal our lives and change us. He wants to open our eyes so that we can see how much he has done for us and how much we need him.

Jesus' mission is our mission. We must proclaim this good news to everyone. As one New Testament scholar said, "The debt of sin has been released, and salvation has been offered. We are called upon to accept this truth and put our trust in Jesus. Then we are to turn and proclaim this news to everyone else. In a time of darkness and distress there is Jesus who brings life and light to our lives." (Dale Bruner)

We need to tell others that they need Jesus just like us. Not complaining or grumbling, but with joy and happiness. Have you ever said Jesus, "I believe in You. I am with you, come what may? Have you ever told Him that. If not, start today to create a new habit.

Breaking bad habits is a challenging yet rewarding journey we all are on, especially when approached with faith and dependence on God. By addressing the root causes of our complaining and grumbling, surrendering to His strength, replacing harmful behaviors with

Godly practices, and seeking support from others, we too can experience the freedom and renewal that Christ offers. Amen.