

A Reading of Luke 4:21-30....

The more I thought about this text, the more I thought playing in the sandbox as a child. No matter how big or small the sandbox was, there always seemed to be a least one child or a small group of children who thought it was exclusively their own. **Most** anyone could play there... **if** you played along with them. Some days the sandbox was a farm with fields to plow... other days it was a construction site with roads and hills to build.... and other days it was a battlefield – in more ways than one – with each one bombarding the other’s defenses . If you didn’t like the way we played, too bad. As those in control made all the rules, and it was “their way or the highway.” Fortunately for the rest of us, there were no cliffs in the sandbox from which to throw anyone.

This passage picks up where we left off last week with Jesus, after the reading from Isaiah, proclaiming, “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*” (vs. 21)
And the response he received: “*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.*” (vs. 22)

Yet the problem with preachers is that they never really know when to quite. What we heard last week had been reaffirming, giving the hearers hope in themselves. But Jesus just couldn’t stop there, could he? Noooooooooo!
For now – as others have so often said – he went from “preaching to meddling!” As long as he said what they wanted to hear and did what they expected of him, following their rules and traditions, he was welcome in their sandbox.

Yet what was all this talk about God caring for and blessing those “Gentiles”... those people who don’t believe what we believe... those people who do not follow our traditions and do things the way we do them...certainly he is not referring to people like those heathen Romans?!

Within the church to whom Luke wrote, I am sure there were other people they just loved to hate... people who didn’t always see things the way we saw them – which, of course, from our perspective was always the “**right** way.” For how can we be wrong if we know we are always right?

Jesus had some nerve telling them what they did not want to hear... even if it were true! “*When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.*” (vs. 28) Is it possible for one person to be right and everyone else be wrong? It is if that one person is Jesus... or one who is living out the life of faith to which he has called each and everyone of us!

Jesus gave them a choice that day... to either hear and heed what he had to say... or to reject him completely and remain the same as they had always been. “*But,*” despite their attempts to silence him permanently, “*he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.*” (vs.30)

As one commentator noted: “*Jesus does not go elsewhere because he is rejected; he is rejected because he goes elsewhere.*” Are we ready to follow Jesus and do what is right... or are we content and comfortable with the way things are now?

Paul had felt that way at one point in his life and was ready to arrest any who differed with him... until another opened his eyes to what he had been blind to see... and which led him to write these words to a “Gentile people.”

A Reading of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (NRSV).....

Remember the letter from Nan that I shared with you and the young people a little earlier this morning?

“Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of every body in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it.”

That reminded me of another saying that goes,

“Jesus loves you... and the rest of us are trying very hard to do the same.”

But my most memorable one came from a very angry woman in a former parish who did not take kindly to me disagreeing with her. With a look that would strike fear in the heart of a Marine Corps drill sergeant, she said,

“I love you... (pause) but I don’t like you!”

Now remember these were not the utterances of heathenistic, blood-sucking, Satanic worshipers but they were all spoken by good, God-fearing, respectable church people – just like you and me!

Have you ever questioned what must have been going on within the church at Corinth that would lead Paul to write what he did in the reading I just shared with you? Have you ever wondered if he could have written this same letter to us... to the congregations of the St. Paul’s and Zion Churches?

Now I’m not saying that we’re bad and un-godly people... *(pause... with a questionable look)*... no, I’m not saying that at all! But what I am asking: Is it the love of Christ that dwells within us – not on a part-time basis, but in every moment of every day?

Is it the love of Christ that compels us to reach out beyond ourselves and our comfort zones and the way we have always done things to do what Christ is calling us to do?

Personally, while I would love to be able to answer this question with a resounding, *“Always!”* However, Paul’s words remind me that this is far from true.

As such, it would be easy to admit defeat, to say that I could never be what Christ calls me and each and everyone of us to be, and to settle for being something less than what Christ has called me to be.

But I also know that if this is the path I choose, I will never fully know what my life can be... nor the difference I might make in the lives of others if I but risk to share the love of Christ with them.

Thus each and every day I must ask myself – just as you must: Am I ready to follow Jesus and do what is right...

or am I content and comfortable with the way things are now... even if they are something less than I hoped they would be?

But you know... there is no way you can really honestly answer that without having tasted what Paul found for himself through the grace of God.

Love is patient... and kind... not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way... it is not irritable or resentful... nor does it rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

You know... maybe it is time to fall in love again... as we accept Christ’s love for us... and dare to share that love with others – not only in word, but in every act, in every moment of our lives.

So..... what are you going to do when you leave here today to share the love of Christ — and what I pray is *your* love as well — to share this love with another... with perhaps a family member... a friend... a co-worker... or even a stranger... so as to make this world a better place for all of God’s children... those like us whom we find it easy to care for..., and... those others.