

Love God, Love the World
LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church
June 24, 2018 – AM Sermon
Rev. Ron Radcliffe
Luke 4:14-30

I found an old Christmas wish list I made when I was in elementary school about a year or two ago. On it was all the normal things a young kid might want, Legos, or transformers, whatever was the cool thing at that age. What was different about this one was that I put a rating scale on it: 1 star to 4 stars. ‘1 star’ being want, and ‘4 stars’ being really, really want so badly. But, at the bottom of this list I had one item that had ‘7 stars’. And there was an asterisk by the star. And 7 stars meant, “I would rather die than not get this one.” Wow. How dramatic. This item was “another puppy.” Yes, that’s right. We already had a puppy. Whom I loved with all my heart. I was obsessed with our little puppy, and so what’s better than one of the greatest thing you’ve ever had, but two of it, right?

Well, Christmas came and went and, NO, I did not get another puppy. No, this was not like a Christmas story where after all the gifts were opened there was one hidden in the back with a red ryder bb gun or in this case a puppy hidden in it. Nope. Just a regular Christmas.

Have you ever had high expectations for something, and when the thing gets there, it’s not what you expected? It might even be better than you wanted, but you’re so blind to the fact that it’s not what you expected that you hate it? This was me in my second story. I really wanted to get into filming and film editing, I was taking a class in high school for it and everything. And my parents new this. But, I wanted a really nice camera so I could make really nice videos. But, my parents got me flip camera. It was a small video camera with a little thing that flipped out (hence the name) that you plugged directly into your computer to upload the video you recorded. It was the new hip pocket camera at the time. And, honestly, was the perfect gift I could have received then. But, I thought, if I was getting a nice big camera. And, I was extremely disappointed. And, my mom returned mine for me. It’s honestly one of my biggest regrets in life. How I responded in that moment. My mom got me a wonderful gift, it honestly was so great, but my expectations were so thrown off, that I responded horribly.

I wonder if this is what Luke Skywalker thought in the first Star Wars Movie, when Darth Vader said, “No, I am your father.” I mean...that’s a big blow to your expectations. Your father, who you thought was killed by Darth Vader, turns out to be Darth Vader, the big bad guy. His expectations about someone were shattered in that moment.

I wonder what it must have been like for the people in Jesus’ hometown. Put yourself in their shoes. Here he is, a grown man, but they all knew him his whole life growing up. I mean, what must it have been like to have the goodiest goody-two shoes of them all, the boy who never sins, around? And now, you’ve been hearing these, pretty crazy stories, people being healed, he’s a phenomenal speaker and preacher. But, he’s been doing all these crazy, amazing, almost unbelievable things elsewhere for the past year. And now he’s back. But, you know better, right? This is just Joseph’s little boy. The one we all saw running around, growing up. And here he is. And if all these stories are half true. He better show up. I want to see this magic man do his stuff. I want to hear this world class orator awe me with his preaching.

So Jesus shows up at the synagogue, something he does on the regular, and he’s handed the scroll from Isaiah, reads a messianic prophecy, one all the Jews there would have known, and after he reads it, he casually rolls it back up. Sits down. And when he sees all the eyes on him he

declares, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” But the congregation responds negatively. No, no, this is just Joseph’s son.

Is it just me, or does anyone else have slightly less patience for their own family? If you’re somewhere else, you’ll put up with somethings, but when it comes to your siblings, cousins, family friends, your patience bucket is just a little bit smaller. I wonder if Jesus thought, “I know what you are thinking: Hey Physician, heal yourself.” What we’ve heard you do in Capernaum, the surrounding countryside where he’d been preaching and performing miracles for the past year, do here. Prove it. Do it here in your hometown. And, he wants nothing of it. And, then he shares two interesting stories.

1. During the days of Elijah, he says that Elijah never went to any of the Israelite widows, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. NOT, an Israelite. A foreigner.
2. During Elisha’s time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of them were healed, only Naaman the Syrian.” Another foreigner.

And this is what really angered the people. Because, the Jesus, the real Jesus that they are meeting now. The one who, Luke specifically says is “Going out in the power of the Spirit.” is not who they were expecting. I bet Jesus just wanted to come home for a quick breather from all this hard work in and around Galilee, preaching, healing, and just get a break back home. But, instead, they demand he perform for them. They demand he proves himself. And, since he’s making claims he’s the messiah, you better be our messiah. The one we want.

But, Jesus wasn’t what they expected. If they had paid attention, they would have seen that the messiah was always for everyone, not just the Israelites. The covenant made, all the way back to Abraham, was ALL the peoples of the earth would be blessed through Abraham and his offspring. And, the two stories that Jesus shares here, God was about everyone. In the times of Elijah and Elisha, two of the greatest prophets in the Scriptures, God was about everyone. Including the foreigner. The sojourner. The refugee. Jesus, wasn’t what they expected. He didn’t fit their preconceived idea of what a messiah was supposed to look like. And the people he was hanging out with, didn’t look like them. They looked different.

And, so, I have only one question for you today. What Jesus do you worship? Is it the Jesus of the bible? The one we find in the scriptures, who was born 2000 years ago, died, but then on the third day rose from the grave and is alive, and seated at the right hand of God the Father, who will one day come back to judge the living and the dead? Is it the one who was born in Bethlehem, but then his parents had to immediately flee their home country because things got dangerous, risking their and their kids’ lives to get him out of there, fleeing to Egypt as refugees? Is it this Jesus? That is a refugee kid himself? Thankful, I’m sure that the country they fled to accepted them. Is it the one who came for people who weren’t of the same country as him? Or the same country as you? Jesus came to save the WHOLE world. Not just Israel. Not just America. Is it the one who went from city to city both preaching AND healing? Who cared about people NOW. Today. Not just for when they die. But today.

To be a follower of Christ, means to live like Christ. Live. Today. We’re called to be like Christ. Which means, if this is what Jesus is for, this is what we’re for. If this is what Jesus was about, this is what we’re about. And Jesus told us in this passage what he is about: He is about:

- proclaiming good news to the poor
- He is about proclaiming liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,
- He is about giving liberty those who are oppressed and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.

If you find something that claims to be “Christian” but isn’t about these things, it’s not Christian. It doesn’t matter if it’s an organization, song, country, or group. To be a follower of Jesus Christ, a Christian, means to be about these very same things. So much around us muddles up this and gets this confused. It muddies the witness we have to the world.

Jesus said that all of the laws and the prophets are summed up in two things: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. And, he explained who our neighbors are. He said, YOU be the good neighbor. This means, everyone is your neighbor.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. This is who Jesus is. This is what Jesus is about. And those who follow Jesus will do these things. 43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons and daughters of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” “He sends help to foreign widows, and heals lepers from other countries.”

As Christians, we claim that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. We love the Savior part: Grace, peace, forgiveness. But, the Lord part? Repentance, obedience, submission...that’s hard. So what now? How do I do this? How do I become interested in proclaiming good news to the poor and liberty to the captives? How do I set at liberty those who are oppressed? Well, the first thing you can do is ask one of your pastors. Bob, Kristy, Peter, Mike any of them. They have so many resources.

Here are two actual ministries doing this here in GR. I found them in one google search. We have access to so much. Pastor Bob, Kristy, Peter, Mike, have so many resources. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Jesus said, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

- How do we actually proclaim good news to the poor? And liberty to the captives?
Crossroads Prison Ministries: Write letters. Who here can do that?
- Set at liberty those who are oppressed? Do you know about Degage? It’s right there.
Right next door. I know many of you already help out. Which is wonderful.

As we leave from here this morning, may people know we are disciples of Jesus, by our love. And may our love be wide enough that it encompasses who Jesus said his disciples are to love. Beyond our family and friends, and even to our enemies. This, is radical, Christ-like love. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Please pray with me...God, show us the areas where we have tried to mold you into our likeness, and soften our hearts and our minds and let us be molded into your likeness. Through Christ, we pray, Amen.

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