

The Good From Nazareth

Jesus begins his ministry. Now, if I were going to begin a ministry I'd go to a pretty large city and find people who are smart, and educated, and kind, and generous. Oh, yes, I did that! I came to Hamilton and to MacNeill where people are all of those things. Jesus had that option, but he chose a completely different path.

Now, let's get a picture of this in our mind. Jesus has had some pretty amazing and probably life-altering experiences recently. He had finally chosen to be baptized in the Jordan River where a dove from heaven flew down and pronounced that he is the son of God. Then he goes into the desert for a very long time without eating and has three more epiphanies that we call temptations. He defeats Satan three times and affirms his life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus has just been through an amazing, life altering time. He may have even felt a bit elevated over his former self. Son of a Carpenter? No, Son of God. Son of God and firm in his commitment to the Kingdom of God. He's ready to begin what God has called him to do.

So, off he goes to begin preaching this Good News from GOD. Does he head off to Jerusalem? After all, it's nearby, according to Google maps about a one day walk from the Mount of Temptation; it's full of people that are educated and perhaps have some money that could help his ministry. No, he doesn't go there. Maybe he could have gone to Bethlehem, about a day and a half walk; very respectable place, the City of King David. The Wise men visited him there.

No, neither of those places is the right place; he goes to Galilee, to a synagogue in Nazareth (according to Google maps, about a four day walk). A synagogue in Nazareth (what good can come from Nazareth?), with the old-fashioned routine of synagogue worship, with its mechanical dullness and its mistaken interpretations of God's word, its shallow and superficial and tedious traditional commentaries, its vain repetitions; and that odd way of talking ... slovenly consonants you know; the brunt of Judean ridicule ... they dropped their 'aitches'. Whatever might have been the value of Nazareth for an ordinary unenlightened Jewish person on an ordinary Sabbath day, how could it have been necessary and what profit could there have been in it for the divinely gifted Son of God?

My questions today are twofold. "Why did Jesus go back to Nazareth?" and "What can we learn because Jesus began his earth changing ministry in Nazareth?"

Our reflections today will be inspired by two powerful Scripture passages: 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul reminds us that all parts of the body are equally valuable, and Luke 4, where Jesus proclaims the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in His hometown of Nazareth. Together, these passages reveal a profound truth about God's view of our daily lives.

First, the body. All parts are equally valuable. Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians 12, about the body of Christ, comparing it to a human body. "The body is not made up of one part but of many. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?" (vv. 14, 17). Everybody has purpose and value.

Now, the world is the entire body of humanity and Paul's teaching reminds us that every role, every gift, and every person is essential. No part is more important than another. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you," just as we cannot say that one job, or one task, or one person's contribution is less significant than

another. I wonder, though, as I ponder this about 'all'. Is it 'all I we think is 'good' or is it 'all'; even that which we think is 'not good'. Something to ponder over your week. But we are told that all are needed.

Think about your own life. Perhaps you're a teacher or a parents; a caregiver or a waiter; a recipient of the Order of Canada or someone working behind the scenes. Paul reminds us that God sees all of it—and God values all of it. Our ordinary tasks, done faithfully, are a crucial part of God's work in the world.

Pause

Second Scripture contains the Proclamation of Jesus from Luke 4

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to
bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and
recovery of sight to the blind, to let the
oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. Bless the word of God.

First, Jesus' proclamation speaks to the poor and the oppressed. The people of Nazareth are certainly poor and oppressed thanks to the Romans, and Assyrians, and the Babylonians.

Then, smack dab in the middle of the recitation, Jesus promises to "release the captives and recover sight to the blind". There may be captives in prison and people with low vision in his congregation. OR, perhaps Jesus has come back to isolated, insulated Nazareth where people are captives of their culture and blind to the harm that is inflicted on them by their commitment to their never-changing culture and their insistence on maintaining the status quo. Culture ... the water we swim in. Perhaps Jesus knows that we can drown in the water we swim in.

By the way, stay tuned next week to find out to just what lengths we are willing to go to protect the status quo. There's an angry mob involved.

Pause

Now, staying with this scripture for a minute more, Jesus was talking to people who would have known by heart the scripture from the Prophet Isaiah. So, they would have noticed, with wonder, that Jesus didn't finish the quote from Isaiah. Isaiah says, "The Lord has anointed me to release, recover and (among other things) ... "proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." But Jesus stopped short of the next part of the quote' "... the day of God's vengeance." He rolled up the scroll and sat down before he said, "and the day of God's vengeance". Did he forget vengeance? Or perhaps, as we suppose, he left vengeance out on purpose.

The truths from 1 Corinthians and Luke intersect.

Why Nazareth? Luke reminds us, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus has begun to fulfill the prophecy. He has begun his work. He has begun his Messiahship. And he did it on purpose with the people for whom it is directly meant. The people he knew best.

Because Jesus' mission was for everyone—not just the powerful or the prominent, but for the poor, the ones who are the brunt of jokes, and the ordinary people. By choosing Nazareth, Jesus shows us that God values the small places, the normal routines, the bits that are ridiculed, and the everyday lives of God's people.

When we connect these passages, a beautiful picture emerges. Paul's teaching about the body of Christ and Jesus' proclamation in Nazareth both affirm the sacredness of the ordinary and the purpose of everyone's ordinary.

In Jesus proclamation in Nazareth, we are told of the sacredness of the ordinary, the value of our lives that are just 'normal', and the sacredness of the intention of our everyday activities, and the sacredness of all the lives of the people of God's world.

Often, we fall into the trap of thinking that our lives need to be extraordinary to matter. Social media, cultural expectations, and even our own insecurities can make us feel like our daily routines and roles are insignificant. But Scripture tells us otherwise.

Every part of the body is vital. Every small act of love, service, and faithfulness matters deeply to God. And Jesus' choice to announce His mission in Nazareth reminds us that God's kingdom is built not just in grand gestures, but in the ordinary acts of ordinary people.

AND NOW is the "year" of God's favour. Right now God's radical, gentle delight¹ pours over everyone, without discrimination. Now we now know that every single bit of ourselves and the selves of every other is valued in the eyes of God. Every duty, small or large, significant or apparently meaningless should be honoured, and practiced with intention and reverence in the name of The Christ Jesus.

Pause

So how do we live out this truth? How do we embrace the value of our normal lives?

First, don't get side-tracked by looking for 'vengeance from God' because that is not the Good News that Jesus brought. Jesus focussed on our ordinary lives that are in relationship with God. Jesus focussed on us doing what we ought to be doing. We need to focus on our intentions, our participation, and our relationships in our ordinary living. That we think that 'vengeance' should be enacted is a total waste of our time on earth.

Second, shift our Perspective: We need to see our daily tasks as acts of worship. Whether we're washing dishes, helping a neighbor, or working at your job, we need to do it with the awareness that God is present and is cheering us on in whatever we do.

Third, celebrate the contribution of all Others: Just as Paul urged the Corinthians to honor all parts of the body, let's take time to appreciate the people around us. Thank the cashier, the janitor, the friend who checks in on you; thanks to the man that you pass in the grocery store that smells a bit because he hasn't had a place to shower today. Recognize the beauty of their roles in God's Kingdom.

Finally, trust God's Plan: Remember that God often works through the small and the humble. Trust that your intention of faithfulness in the ordinary is part of God's extraordinary plan for creation.

¹ From 'Favor', Steve Garnaas-Holmes

****Conclusion:****

There is grace in all the ordinary mundane day to day jobs that we do. There is contribution to God's kingdom by every single action of every single human but not because a vengeful God will getcha or family will disown you if you don't do your ordinary duties. Do them because those duties are beautiful if you do them with spiritual intention, praising God with each small movement of our entire day, and week and life.

There is immense value in our normal lives. The God who made us, who chose Nazareth to reveal His mission, and who calls every part of the body essential—this God sees us, loves us, and values us just as we are. As we embrace the beauty of the everyday, we trust that our faithfulness in the small things builds the kingdom of God in ways we may not yet see.

Jesus is, every day, launching a campaign that is an insurrection of gentleness, a revolt of kindness. Jesus reminds us that we don't have to wait for permission to shake up the world, we are anointed for this by God's grace. You and I are the ones who will do justice and love mercy for ourselves and for all the people of the world.

Amen.