

Sermon 31 January 2016

Luke 4:21-30 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 'On the Edge'

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our rock and redeemer. Amen

"²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff." **What** might it take to drive you to the 'edge'? And **what on earth** was Jesus really saying that day in his **home** town? What drove his 'local's to try taking him to the edge to throw him over? This has been James Tissot's painting, and this is a photo of Nazareth's cliff's.

It was / is real, this cliff edge. **So** is a truth that Jesus teaching will take you to the edge! If you are comfortable with your faith, don't have any questions, doubts, worries, prayers to nag the Lord with... then maybe you need to start with asking the Lord for an 'edge'. And if today's reading is any example he will drive you to one – fast as! **Because on the edge** is where Jesus is. Most of his ministry is on the edge; on the edge of the towns, the edge of 'polite' society (the acceptable, nice, successful people) as much as people's theological tolerance and prejudices.

Of course a difficulty we have is that he doesn't stay on any one edge, he moves on 'slips through the middle of our crowd' to the next place he has to be making his challenges. **We can't hold him, control him, even keep him 'safe'**, he is just going to keep doing what he has to, what he came to do, what God and the Holy Spirit **fill him up with** and send him forward with. cV

So are you *at least* wondering *what on earth* he said to make his home town so mad? So illogical? So angry and wanting to murder him? Of course we weren't there and so we have to *guess a little* and *despite* my usual sources of background material, I am not quite sure **who** started the fight. But a fight it certainly was between Jesus and the synagogue / crowd.

The day started really well, remember last week? Jesus went to the synagogue (church) as usual, they acknowledged his preaching ability because when the time came for the preaching, he stood up, (came forward) took the scroll chosen for him – remember no Bibles yet, just what we call the 1st Testament on scrolls... The scroll for Isaiah was chosen and Jesus was allowed to choose the text.

This is **I am sure** is where the day's tension started. His announcement – the messiah, Isaiah spoke of – **was him** – "fulfilled in their hearing". He was claiming to be the Messiah, but then he ^{1*} did not follow the Isaiah text directly. He made at least three alterations / changes to the straight text. He omitted a phrase in 61:2b--"**the day of vengeance of our God**," *Possibly* because this would sound a negative note in an overwhelmingly positive message **or** was his message deeper than this scholar's ponderings? Jesus borrowed a phrase from Isaiah 58:6--literally: "to send the broken ones release"--and inserted it toward the close of the reading. He also omitted the phrase "to bind up the broken-hearted" in Isaiah 61:1. He spoke of the Year of the Lord's favour (Year of Jubilee).

In the Year of Jubilee / Lord's favour, (and it is questioned whether it actually ever happened, but...) the theory of the year of Jubilee was that you got back, were set free, wrongs made right... Of course if you were needing those things – it was Great News – **but if** you were a land owner, slave holder, merchant... It was not good news!! None of us like to be told we're about to have to **let go** of our possessions... have our income dropped, see the 'gains of the past 50 years disappear.... Jesus listeners were having to listen hard and do a lot of processing – very fast.

And just as fast is their mood change! From being amazed at his **gracious** words, and **marvelling** with eyes fixed on him – to murderous rage! I do have to wonder if Jesus omitted 'the vengeance' bit deliberately from the words of the discussion / 'fight', because when they challenge his ability to heal Jesus replies: 1. He claims prophetic status 2. Tells them that as his hometown / locals they don't get

special treatment, there is no favouritism. God's prophets (also) go to outsiders, foreigners to provide for in hard times and offering healing. **But these people** were their enemies and... and Jesus had just been promising them the Year of the Lord's favour, **and – and remember** that bit Jesus missed out from Isaiah? **They would** have vengeance on their enemies **not**: healing / providing food / caring / serving / 'saving'.

So not only did Jesus **omit** the bit about vengeance, – he told them **they were missing out** by not accepting him, and – AND reinforced that **God cared** for their enemies at least as much as for them... They were not – **are not** the only ones who struggle with the way God loves. **We all** want exclusive rights to our love and to be loved... and while yes God loves each one of us completely individually – he loves you exactly as much as he loves me – and you and the street walker- and street-sleeper and prison inmate and adulterer and bully no matter what they have done – we've done, because love is not based – **this love** is not based on annual income, or reward for hard work, or because we're clever, have charismatic gifts, special personalities – this love **is** because God is *made that way*, God is Love, God loves. Cv

What a gift we have today to be able to reflect on Paul's **brilliant passage** about love, **about God-love** not our 'dim' reflections – but the **real thing**. God is love Paul says, and his words about real love are without equal *I think!* What is even more interesting is the thought that **God looks at our hearts** to figure out what is 'going' on for us; what our priorities are; our life drivers; our motivations; what makes us 'tick'; who **we really are**, he **doesn't look** at our 'face'. In fact in today's language we might well say God's facial recognition app is disabled – and has always been – probably never installed! God **doesn't identify** us by outward features – but from our heart. A 'real' heart looks something like this. So when it is God-love – it is purely love poured toward us – no matter what we are like... And what happens next, is another thing!

But today, Paul wants us to 1. Know God-love is 'mine', for each **one** of us to receive – completely alone, God's focus is on the 'me' and if we cannot acknowledge our need for love – God's love we will not be of any use to God, for God in the world. 2. Know it is 'mine' / for me **to pass on** for each **one** of us **to share**. If we do anything **without** it as an ingredient in what we do – then what we do is value-less, **has no value** because this-love provides the value.

Paul goes on to add that Love **adds more** to what we do – having it as the **main ingredient** in all we do, it **keeps what we do** honest, just, and good news for all people. Love is like glue holding us in God's ways and allowing what we do to be truly for the common good. Paul warns of what it is if we **have not love**: = empty, nothing, stilled, disappear, pass away... It is not life. We are but a dim reflection or a hollow shell of humanity. And he warns even when we do, care is needed to make it work **like God in Jesus wants**.

But be warned – we have this God-love, and when we do our best to love like God in Jesus, we too may find ourselves driven to the edge, because to be compassionate, to be prophets, to speak for heart recognition of all 'other's' as belonging in love to each other. We will be 'courting danger',^{2*} Loader say's

Remember for Jesus listeners that day **something** he said in that sermon about these words: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." – Something here *or not* was enough to drive them to a murderous rage – and try to throw him off the edge of the cliff.

What would it look like for Jesus' first sermon and this reading from Isaiah to be fulfilled this day, here? Would such commitments take us out to cliffs, to "edges" we would rather not face? How large is your view of God's nature, how wide is your understanding of God's embrace, how deep is your sense of the movement of God? Will we try to stop such love? We will run from such a love, and such a call, **or** will we seek it with **all our heart**, and let it take us out to the edges, where risk, and hope, and courage all lie?^{3*} Can we love like God-in-Jesus? Amen