

“Grace Without Borders”

Luke 4:21-30

Last week, we heard the story from the Gospel of Luke where Jesus, on the Sabbath, stood in the synagogue of his hometown—Nazareth. He read from the book of Isaiah and boldly declared, “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

At first, everything went well. The people were amazed. Their hearts swelled with pride. “He’s one of us!” they thought. This wasn’t just any preacher—this was Jesus, their Jesus, the boy who had grown up among them, now a renowned prophet!

But admiration quickly turned to outrage. Applause turned into anger. And before long, they were chasing him out of town, ready to throw him off a cliff. What happened? How did things fall apart so fast?

It wasn’t what Jesus proclaimed that upset them—it was what came next. He refused to say what they wanted to hear. He refused to affirm their belief that they alone were God’s chosen people. Instead, he spoke a truth they weren’t ready to face: God’s kingdom isn’t just for us. It’s for them, too.

A World Divided

If this story feels familiar, it’s because we see it playing out in our world today. Communities everywhere wrestle with questions of belonging, justice, and inclusion. A few months ago, I had a strange experience. I was out walking my dog, Joy, when he stopped to sniff around a yard near the parsonage. Just then, a car pulled into the driveway, and a woman stepped out. I greeted her with a simple “Hi.” She responded in kind, but without any introduction, she immediately asked, “Where do you live?” Something in her tone made me feel like she had already decided I didn’t belong. I answered, “Dartmouth Avenue.” She gave a short “Oh,” and walked away.

Maybe it was just a small, local moment. But think about the bigger conversations happening in our society today—immigration, birthright citizenship, who belongs and who doesn’t. These debates are about questions, “Who gets to be inside the circle? Who is ‘one of us,’ and who is ‘them’? Who is worthy of help, benefits, and opportunity?”

Some argue that automatic citizenship places too much burden on public services—education, healthcare, welfare. They claim that undocumented immigrants and their so-called “anchor babies” will take advantage of the system. Even though study after study proves otherwise, people hold onto their fears.

Why? Because of scarcity thinking. We fear that if we open the doors too wide, there won’t be enough for us. That if they gain, we lose. But as we’ve seen these past two weeks, God’s kingdom doesn’t work that way. Grace isn’t a limited resource. God’s love isn’t a pie that shrinks when more people come to the table. In fact, God’s grace grows when it’s shared.

That’s the economy of Jesus.

And yet, fear persists. People want to secure resources exclusively for their own. The well-being of our people becomes more important than the well-being of others. So, we build walls—physical and metaphorical—to protect ourselves. We don’t want to hear anything that challenges our beliefs. But in doing so, we risk shutting out the very people God is calling us to love.

That’s exactly what happened in Nazareth. The people wanted Jesus to confirm their beliefs—to say, “Yes, you are the ones who matter most. God’s kingdom starts here, with you, for you.” And at first, it seemed like that’s exactly what he was saying. But then, Jesus reminded them of two stories they didn’t want to hear—Elijah and the widow at Zarephath, and Elisha and Naaman the Syrian. These stories flipped the script. When famine struck, God didn’t send Elijah to an Israelite widow, but to a Gentile. And when healing was needed, God healed Naaman—a Syrian, an outsider, even an enemy. What Jesus said to the people in Nazareth was, “You are important, but you are not the only ones who are important in God’s sight.” This was not what they wanted to hear, and they were furious.

Prophetic Truths in a Polarized World

Jesus’ words in Nazareth were hard to hear because they challenged the crowd’s insular thinking. He wasn’t interested in being their hometown hero. He wasn’t there to reinforce their sense of comfort or

superiority as God's chosen people. Instead, he called them to something far more radical—a love that crossed boundaries, challenged assumptions, and made them deeply uncomfortable.

That same radical love challenges us today. Are we willing to welcome the stranger? To listen to voices different from our own? To extend grace even to those we see as enemies? Or do we, like the crowd in Nazareth, resist the idea that God's blessings are for everyone—even those we fear or dislike?

This is a hard message in a divided world. We live in a time when people are quick to label others as enemies—political opponents, people of different races or religions, even fellow church members. But Jesus' words force us to ask some tough questions: How are we treating the least among us? Are we building walls or tearing them down? Are we choosing grace or grievance?

Here's the undeniable truth: The church was never meant to build walls and exist solely for those inside. The church exists for those beyond its doors. That's why some have said, "The church is the only institution where the only requirement for membership is to have no requirements." There should be no barriers to being a Christian.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "The church is not a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners." Think about that for a moment. A hospital isn't for people who are perfectly healthy—it's for those who are hurting, those in need of care and healing. Theologically speaking, sin is not just breaking a rule—it's a separation from God and from one another. And if the church is truly a hospital for sinners, then it must be a place where our wounds are healed by the love of Christ, where our broken relationships—with God and with others—are restored. It means we cannot and should not build walls. I once heard about a church in the Bronx, New York, that had an unusual sign at its door. Most buildings have signs that say, "Trespassers will be prosecuted." But this church chose to put up a sign that read, "Trespassers will be forgiven and welcomed." That is the strange and beautiful reality of the church. And that is the reality we are called to live into.

Conclusion: Love Wins

In the end, the crowd in Nazareth was furious. They drove Jesus out of town, ready to throw him off a cliff. But what happened next? Jesus walked away. He didn't fight back. He didn't argue. He didn't return their hate with hate. He simply walked away. I believe this is a powerful sign that love is stronger than hate.

The crowd wanted to silence him, but the truth kept speaking. They wanted to push him off a cliff, but his mission continued. Jesus walked away because God's love cannot be stopped. No amount of rejection, fear, or anger could change the truth he proclaimed—that God's grace has no borders, that God's love is bigger than we imagine.

And that is still true today. We live in a world where people build walls—both physical and emotional. Where fear fuels division. Where anger turns people against one another. But love wins. It always has, and it always will. The love of Christ refuses to be confined by human barriers. It reaches beyond our fears, beyond our prejudices, beyond the limits we try to impose.

So the question is, how will we respond? Will we, like the people of Nazareth, reject the radical grace of God because it makes us uncomfortable? Or will we allow Jesus to expand our vision, to stretch our hearts, to lead us beyond our comfort zones? The church is not a fortress, but a refuge. Not a private club, but a place of healing. Not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. And if we truly believe that, then we must live it. We must be a church that opens its doors, extends its arms, and tears down walls. Because in the end, grace is not ours to control. It is God's to give. And thanks be to God—love wins. Amen.