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Denise Carrell

Come Thou Unexpected Jesus: The Moment Before the Truth

Isaiah 61:1-11; Luke 4:14-28

Over the next few weeks, we will explore some key Biblical moments when Jesus was, quite simply, not who people wanted him to be.

As his ministry began, he was faced with years of tradition, and scriptures, and teachings and laws which had culminated into a clear messianic expectation. The Israelites were expecting a very certain savior. And yet, as we will explore, Jesus seemed to have little interest in fulfilling that expectation. Jesus' mission did not appear to be one of human appeasement.

Throughout the stories we will explore, Jesus had what seems to be very clear moments of choice. Today's passage marks the beginning of his ministry in his hometown.

Before we begin to explore what that may have meant — first, some context:

After his baptism, Jesus had been teaching and healing in Galilee, according Luke, “everyone praised him” (Luke 4:15). So, when Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth, his reputation had preceded him.

Jesus, as was his habit, attended Sabbath in the synagogue (Luke 4:16). During these Sabbath services, it was customary to read the Shema (*specific scriptures which, “affirm God’s singularity and kingship”*¹), followed with a series of prayers, readings from the Law and the Prophets, and an exposition or instruction on the basis of such readings (*like a sermon*). As part of that service, Jesus was given the opportunity to read from the Prophets, from which he selected and read Isaiah 61:1-2 (*which was part of our first passage today*).²

This Isaiah text is good news — it speaks of the Year of Jubilee: a time where captives would be released, there would be recovery and healing, all debts would be canceled, and land would be returned to its original owner, “In general whatever had gone wrong in the last 40 years would be set aright.”³ While we have no record of this Jubilee having ever actually been observed, its promise held much hope.

So when Jesus reads this passage, the reaction is positive. His reputation has preceded him, and all were eager to hear his teaching and experience the healing he had done in other places.

But then he begins to talk about historic prophets and healings: specifically, Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17) and the story of Elisha and Naaman (2 Kings 5).

Without going too much into their specific stories, the issue here, is that in direct answer to the crowd’s expectations of blessings, Jesus instead reminds them of prophets who healed Gentiles

¹ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-shema>

² Gonzalez, *Luke*

³ *ibid* 64

and not Israelites. Basically, while declaring that, through himself, the year of the Lord's favor had come, Jesus also seems refuse to be limited to blessing and healing only the expected people.

For this revelation, he is almost thrown from a cliff.

By the very people who had known him since childhood.

But there's one more quiet choice here. I wonder if you heard it? Because this disruptive revelation was not limited to Jesus himself. In that moment, by exclusion, he chose to reveal something about God.

Jesus left out a key component in that Isaiah passage - He skipped the part about the "day of the Lord's vengeance" (Isaiah 61:2), declaring instead only the year of the Lord's favor. And I wonder if the crowd was enraged by not only audacity of his self-declaration coupled with his refusal to preform exclusionary healing, by also by his intentional dismantling of their assumptions about God.

So, that's the backstory. But before I get ahead of myself, I would like for us today to enter into curiosity — what was this moment like for Jesus? Was he tempted to accommodate? To assimilate? To just get along?

So, this morning, I invite you to imagine the moment with me, asking what can we learn from his choice?

When Jesus walked this earth, he walked this earth in flesh

He too felt his skin touch the soil, the weight of gravity pulling on his body

And as he stood in the synagogue, he stood before those who knew that body

Those who had seen it grow

Those who had watched it work

Those for whom his smile was familiar

And yet in this moment, Jesus revealed a hidden part of himself

A part truer than the body they knew

In that moment, he pulled back the veil and invited those that knew him best to truly know him

His authentic self

His divinity

In the past, I've usually read this story as Jesus boldly declaring his ministry

Bravely and with so much self-assurance

But now I wonder

What was going through his head at that moment

Was he nervous

Did he start to second guess himself

Was there a moment that he was tempted to just keep being the Jesus they all knew

You see he had just come from the desert where he had been tempted (Luke 4)

He'd just been offered power and riches and influence

and I almost wonder if this is an extension of that narrative... one more temptation...

and this one *seems* so much less extravagant

As he is surrounded by his people, by his hometown

He has the chance to just

Not

The chance to read the scroll. To sit down. And to stop talking.

He has the chance to just live a quiet life

The opportunity to slip on the ill fitting but seemingly safe skin of familiarity

To just be the carpenter's son

To live the lie

Do you *see* the nefarious allure of this comfortable inauthenticity?

Because it is so much scarier to tell the people you love the most the truth about yourself

When everyone is expecting you to be one thing and you have to stand up and tell them that in

order to be true to who you actually are

You can't be who they want you to be

So I wonder.

What happened in that moment before Christ stood up?

The moment before he read

The moment before he spoke

His *choice* moment

Did he falter at all?

These choice moments are not an anomaly in Luke's gospel

Chapters later, in Luke 22, Jesus is faced with the cross and he asks God for another way

In this moment Jesus' humanity and his divinity exist in disunity

Jesus wrestles with himself

Yet even then, he chooses authenticity

To be who he truly was

Even to his death

Dear friends, these moments are a gift to us: when the holy veil is lifted and we can so deeply identify with the humanity of Christ. We understand *that* Jesus.

The Jesus whose knees are knocking as he stands in the synagogue

The Jesus who weeps in the garden

And then, as an extension of that gift, we get to see that Jesus chose the more difficult,

the more painful, the more honest path

We so often live in these choice moments - the sinews of time

Where we too have to decide

Do we keep speaking

Do we keep revealing

Do we live fully into our authentic selves

Do we chose the more potentially painful, honest path?

But, also,

there are times that we are the receivers of the boldness of another's authentic moments

Will we be those of whom those truth tellers are afraid?

Because sometimes we are those who are speaking authenticity, but sometimes we are the recipients of one another's truth

And regardless, may our receptivity be the same

Sourced in love

Drenched in love

Let us not take the tempter's role - let us not be the ones who say to just be who we want you to be and nothing more. Let us never prioritize our comfort over another's honesty.

Instead may we be so shockingly accepting of authenticity,

Through our example as those who live it and as those who gloriously accept it, encourage it,
embrace it, celebrate it

That we inspire all around us to be emboldened in their holy truth telling
Unabashed in their divine authenticity

May we all reflect the love and truth of God in this way
Amen and Amen