

Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

Luke 4:21-30

*Short, easy to use, thought provoking background commentary for your sermon, bible study lesson, or scripture reflection.
Listed on The Text This Week, www.textweek.com.*

Year C, Season of Epiphany

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

Sunday Between January 28 to February 3 Inclusive

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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In my not so humble opinion, the authors of the lectionary give us preachers a difficult task by splitting a single story into two passages, last week's proclamation of Good News, [Luke 4:14-21](#), and this week's - the reaction. The whole point of "Gospel" is that it must be both proclaimed **AND** heard to be fulfilled.

By splitting these, the Lectionary seems to suggest we can blather away proclaiming all we want without bothering about being heard. Or, we can listen endlessly without bothering about really hearing.

Whereas the point of Luke 4:14-30 is that proclaiming and hearing must be seamless in order for the Good News to be fulfilled.

This week's lesson begins with [last week's](#) punch line.

The key to understanding this lesson is to imagine the tone of voice in Verse 22:

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words
that came from his mouth.
They said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

Amazed - as in: Wonder? Excitement? Appreciation? Proud? Gee, isn't he something! Look how well one of our own is doing! Why, I knew him when ... *Or ...*

Amazed - as in: Hallelujah! Finally! Here is the Holy One who will fulfill these ancient hopes from the days of Isaiah! *Or ...*

Amazed - as in: Wow! Just who does he think he is! Look who's got too big for his britches! Who's thinking he's holier than us? *Or ...*

Amazed - as in: What did he just say? Isn't he really saying that these words of Isaiah haven't been fulfilled so far because we haven't actually been hearing them? Just who does he think he is to talk to us like that?

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While most English translations seem to opt for the first two, we can see that others change "spoke well of him" to a more neutral "bore witness" (KJV) or "watching and listening" (MSG) which is the Greek root; and choose "wonder," (KJV and NASB) "surprise," (MSG), "marvel" (TEV), or "astonished" (NJB) to describe the crowd's reaction to Jesus' words.

Malina (page 243, see footnote below) helps correct the possible interpretations:

In asking if Jesus is Joseph's son, the synagogue participants are cutting him down to size. They are questioning how such honorable teaching could come from one born to a lowly artisan. This exchange has often puzzled Western commentators who fail to understand the magnitude of the insult implied by the question.

Verse 23. Having heard the question about his parentage (and also keenly aware of the gossip that would still be circulating about him **NOT** being Joseph's son), Jesus begins to reply to their hostile question with an equally hostile reply.

Note the fore-shadowing of "Doctor, heal yourself" with the later taunt for Jesus to save himself from death and shame on the cross. And recall the demand to prove himself now with the earlier test to turn stones into bread - which Jesus must honourably refuse to do.

Recall that in Jesus' day it was **DIS**honourable to boast, to seek fame and celebrity, to deliberately do anything for the purpose of drawing attention to oneself. So when anyone who has only heard the second-hand gossip about the things Jesus has done then demands that he do them in their sight - Jesus has to refuse because that would be dishonourable. However. As a worthy Son, Jesus must defend the honour of God, because it is God who ascribed honour to Jesus by declaring, "You are my Son, the Beloved." (Verse 3:22) So. Throughout all 4 Gospels, whenever Jesus is verbally accosted / challenged with hostile questions or demands, he - honourably - vigorously responds in the only socially accepted manner - with verbally hostile questions of his own.

Verses 25 to 27 then provide 2 illustrations from Scripture of the adage in Verse 24:

Outsiders are better able to judge the honour of a prophet than those who know him best.

Malina, page 243

Jesus' response has so thoroughly insulted and dishonoured the crowd that he has left them speechless. Which is a dangerous thing to do, since the only thing left to defend their honour is to take action. Which the crowd does. Malina comments (pages 273-74):

(While) the death of the challenger is sometimes a worthy response to public dishonor, an over-quick resort to violence is often an unintended public admission of failure. In (verbal) honor challenges, the party that first resorts to violence loses the

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exchange: a resort to violence indicates that wits have failed and bully tactics have taken over. Here the crowd tries to throw Jesus off a cliff.

This, of course, will not be the last time words and wits will fail Jesus' opponents and they will resort to violence.

Nor will it be the last time Jesus will pass through the midst of them and be on his way. Though, unlike this time where Luke offers no further elaboration, that last time has led to generations of amazement, wonder, marvel, surprise, and astonishment.

As we listen to this text today, it is important to go back to the opening Verse 21:

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

and really hear Jesus' implied challenge:

And the reason it hasn't been fulfilled so far is because you have not really been willing to really hear it / live it.

Good News is just so much talk if it is only spoken; even the words of the Bible must be actually lived to be transformed into Good News.

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* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.