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St. Peter's, Greenville
Epiphany 4, C
30 January 2022

I had a funny thought the other day: if Jesus had social media, maybe his status would read: "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."¹ (Do you remember that from last week's Gospel reading?) This led me to wonder how many 'friends' would Jesus have? Would the sheer volume of friend requests blow up the Meta servers ~ he'd no doubt accept every request that came his way, right? Or maybe he'd have one of those 'public pages', one that didn't have friends, but only 'followers'.

I started thinking about this because the men of Nazareth seem to want to get in on the benefits of social networking with Jesus.

We pick up this morning right where we left off last week. Jesus, visiting the synagogue in his home town, has just read from the Prophet Isaiah about restoration, justice, mercy, liberation. He looks up from the scroll before him and makes eye contact with the faithful who have gathered with him for worship and preaches the ultimate one-sentence sermon: "Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Their minds are blown! They are in awe, deeply touched by Jesus' gracious words. The kid who lived down the block, the one with the iffy birth story, the one who got lost for several days after the Passover, **that** kid has grown up into this man who is causing quite a stir. Word has travelled about how he's a popular itinerant preacher, a teacher, a healer. He's the son of their neighbor, their buddy Joseph who lives a couple of streets over. And Jesus has come back to *them*, to teach *them*, to preach to *them*, and presumably to heal them, too.

But when Jesus senses what the men are all thinking, he says nope, not gonna happen.

Have you ever been disappointed in God? Have you ever wanted God to act a certain way, heal a particular ailment, manifest some specific miracle ... and God

¹ Luke 4

didn't? I for one can say that I have been sorely disappointed in God many times. (No, it's not blasphemous to say such a thing – it's an honest response to some of my unanswered prayers.) For instance, my grandmother never seemed to come to terms with her body that slowly failed her, I didn't get that dream job I was promised right out of grad school, my friend still hasn't overcome her addiction.

Here is a hard truth that we don't talk about much in Church ~ the faithful who show up for prayer and worship and ministry committee meetings, *and* the Sunday after Easter don't get preferential treatment. Many of the Gospel-type miracles aren't for us, they are for those who don't yet know God, who haven't yet clicked the 'follow' button on Jesus' Facebook. The 'big M' miracles might blessedly have happened or will happen to us, but often enough, they won't.

Not only does Jesus say no in this Gospel reading, but then he goes on to remind them of two powerful stories they no doubt studied together at the synagogue a decade or two earlier: that of the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the leper. These are stories about how God upended the social norms and expectations of the day ~ how the prophets sought out and healed these two individuals that were expected to not only be perpetually in the margins, but quietly disappear altogether. Yet both of these outsiders were loved and tended to and healed. They didn't expect it, but they were.

Jesus' fulfilling of Isaiah's prophecy wasn't going to manifest itself in the outward and visible ways his former neighbors expected. They chose to remain captive to their preconceived notions about what Jesus came to Nazareth to do, they chose to remain blind about Jesus' true purpose and intention ... And that made them so angry that they became, well, homicidal.

For the Gospel writer Luke, Jesus' salvific message of restoration, justice, mercy, and liberation was geared toward the entire community, not only (or even primarily!) for the individuals he healed. Luke portrays our Savior as someone who isn't a Santa figure, who comes to heal and restore God's children according to their individual wish lists. Rather Jesus taught his lessons to those who chose to listen, and then he moved on to preach his word and do acts of healing for those who did not yet know his message.

So what do we do with that disappointment and disillusionment we feel when all we want is for Jesus to see our problem as we do and fix it? How do we resolve our frustration at walking the straight and narrow and trying each and every day to

do the whole faith thing right, and still our prayers go unanswered, our requests of God unmet.

One option is to get really angry and give up on Jesus. To wallow in bitterness and give up on hope and kindness and generosity. That would be a choice.

Or (if we're the conflict avoidant type) we can passively accept that all things are according to God's plan and carry on as though there is nothing to notice or get upset about. That, too, would be a choice.

Jesus, too, had moments when he felt the weight of the expectations put on him. He must have been sensitive to them as the men of Nazareth – his friends and fathers of his friends – marched him out of town intending to throw him off a cliff. He felt them as the disciples were angry at him for sleeping in the boat during a storm. He felt them when his dear friend Martha was dressing him down about the death of her brother Lazarus.

He also carried a mixed bag of expectations for God and his disciples: I'm reminded of his time in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion. His followers couldn't stay awake (such a simple request, right?), and God couldn't, wouldn't, change the course of events that were about to play out in the Passion and Crucifixion.

When Jesus felt the weight of unfulfilled expectations from those who loved him, as well as when he felt torn from a perceived disconnect between his own desires and that of God's, he chose to pray. He went off by himself to a quiet place and talked to God about it. Afterward, he put one foot in front of the other, trusting in the work and ministry God called him to, and continued to move forward.

Likewise, we can tell God we're disappointed. Or mad. Or feel like giving up. And after that honest exchange with God, we can keep trying to move forward. That, I believe, is a better choice.

If the weight of expectations can weigh heavily on the heart of our Lord, it should come as no surprise that they can cripple us mere mortals. Regardless of the energy we waste on trying to live up to unrealistic standards, God is still all about the business of loving us, tending to us, and healing us. Just maybe not in the self-centered ways we expect.

As I look back on those three dynamics I spent a lot of time praying about, what did happen was that my family kept showing up to the nursing home, expressing

our love and affection for Grandma, and she knew our love for her was stronger than the increasing weakness of her mind and body. After grad school, I managed to get a better job, with a much better supervisor, in a community that is still supportive of me nearly two decades later. My friend is still my friend, despite her many failed attempts at sobriety. I continue to hold her close, cheering for her successes, and reminding her I love her (and more importantly God loves her) no matter what. None of these prayers worked out in the ways I wanted them to. Yet, I choose to see them as ‘little m’ miracles. God was present and active each time, and helps me trust that God is present and active even when I don’t (yet) recognize it.

It’s not uncommon to try to put God in a box, wanting God to relate to us with special treatment, to fulfill our prayers in precisely the way we want them fulfilled and show up in the ways we desire God’s incarnated presence. Jesus pushes back against this notion, reminding us that God doesn’t belong to us, we belong to God.

We who claim to know Jesus seem to think we know him best. *We* — we the Church — are the modern day equivalent of Jesus’s ancient townspeople. We’re the ones most in danger of domesticating him. We’re the ones most likely to miss him when he shows up in faces we don’t recognize or revere. What will it take to follow him into new and uncomfortable territory? To step away from our social networks, the comfort of our ‘friend-of-Jesus’ status, to leave home and see where he leads? God isn’t about the business of social networking, God is about the business of community-building, working from the outside in.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes that disillusionment, even though it stings, is essential to the Christian life: "Disillusionment is, literally, the loss of an illusion — about ourselves, about the world, about God — and while it is almost always a painful thing, it is never a bad thing, to lose the lies we have mistaken for the truth."

Luke’s story this week calls us to disillusionment. It calls us to leave safe, comfortable spaces and go find Jesus. We can’t stay at home, in familiar territory and expect God to do our bidding. God is on the move. God is busy at the margins. God is doing new things. And we are invited to join God on the journey.