

“The Trailer: More Than We Know”

Luke 4:14-30/Isaiah 58:6-8; 61:1-4

1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon

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I. Introduction

Trailers. I like movie trailers. Movie trailers are the 2-minute previews from a movie designed to get your attention. They introduce the plot of the story without telling you too much. Trailers are designed to “hook you” so you think “I want to see that.” At least that’s how it works for me. If I go to a movie and see the trailers, I am much more inclined to go to another movie. But if I don’t go to a movie for a while, movies tend to “fall off my radar” and I don’t go for a long time. It’s the trailer that makes the difference.

The text in Luke this morning is a type of trailer. In the first three chapters of Luke we get the well-known birth and infancy stories about Jesus. And then we get the stories about John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism and temptations. But all of that is really back story and context. The story about Jesus called Luke really starts with this morning’s text. And it’s a type of trailer. It gets our attention. It introduces the surprises and tension of the plot. It’s a type of “hook” that makes us to say, “I want to hear more.”

So here’s the trailer in Luke. **Read Luke 4:14-30.**

II. Brief Exegesis

Jesus grew up in the small Jewish village of Nazareth. But that’s not where his ministry began. Rather it began in the Galilee area, an area more mixed with different races and kinds of people. It’s bigger and busier.

But early on the “hometown boy does come home” to Nazareth. And on the Sabbath Jesus does what faithful Jewish men do; he goes to the synagogue. In the synagogue there would be prayers, perhaps songs, the collecting of alms for the poor and the reading and discussion of scripture. The priests were down in Jerusalem at the Temple. Synagogues were lay-led. And so as a guest Jesus is given the scroll of Isaiah to read. What Luke is telling us is that Jesus is not some radical outsider to the traditions and practices of Judaism. Rather, Jesus is within the tradition and honors it. In fact, Jesus may have had some training as a rabbi.

So as Jesus stood to read, he chooses texts from Isaiah 58 and 61, the texts read earlier this morning. These are well known texts to the men gathered in that synagogue. These texts are about the coming salvation of God, the reign and rule of God, the grace and power of God to

bring healing and hope to restore the nation and the people. And so as Jesus reads the text you can almost see the men there silently repeating the words themselves: “Good news to the poor...release to the captives...recovery of sight to the blind...to let the oppressed go free.” It was a great hope for one day, someday, a future day. And Isaiah prophesied that salvation would come through God’s anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. So as the men in the synagogue heard Isaiah their minds raced ahead to what that day might look like...how God would act...who it would include. It was the “stuff” of synagogue discussions.

And even more, they had heard about Jesus’ ministry in the Galilee area. Amazing things were being said, miracles, healings, demons cast out, preaching that gathered crowds. Could this Jesus who they saw grow up be the One of whom Isaiah speaks? And could this really be the time?

When Jesus finished reading the text from Isaiah it was time for discussion. But no one said anything. Not yet anyway. They wanted to hear what Jesus had to say. So as rabbis sit down to teach, Jesus sat down. And for the moment the synagogue in Nazareth was silent.

“Today.” The silence is broken with Jesus’ word “today.” “Today the great promises of God in Isaiah are coming true. Today God is acting. Today God’s salvation for the poor, captives, blind, and oppressed is here. Not one day, or someday. Today.”

It’s easy to imagine the excitement in that little synagogue becoming electric. They begin to believe that maybe all the stories about healing and miracles and works of power are true. They begin to believe that maybe Jesus could be the One, the Messiah, the Christ. Just imagine the boy they saw grow up being God’s Messiah! And if Jesus did those works of power in Galilee, how much more will he do in his Jewish hometown. This could be “ground zero” for the coming of God’s kingdom. They all believe, like we all do, that they have a “pretty good handle on God and God’s salvation.”

But then Jesus speaks above the buzz in the synagogue. “Today is the day. But it’s not like you believe; it’s more than you believe. God’s salvation is bigger. It includes more than you know. It’s more than Nazareth and the Galilee area and Israel. And you will struggle with that. Some of you will reject that. It is true, ‘No prophet is accepted in his hometown; this hometown.’”

The mood in the synagogue now begins to quickly change. The excitement is turning to anger. Their beliefs about God and salvation and faithfulness are being challenged. Grumbling and complaining and rejection are beginning to take root.

But Jesus will not back down. He says, “The salvation of God has always been bigger than you believe. Remember the story of Elijah and the drought and famine? There were lots of hungry widows in Israel then. But God’s salvation came through Elijah to one poor widow, a non-Jew in Sidon. Do you remember the story? And do you remember the story of the prophet Elisha and Naaman the Syrian general with leprosy? There were lots of lepers in Israel then, but

the salvation of God healed Namaan who was not a Jew. That's what God's salvation is about. Today is the day. And God's salvation is for you, and for the people in the Galilee area, and for Israel, and for more than Israel. It's also for people from other races and other nations and other religions, because God is the God of all people."

By now things are boiling over in that synagogue in Nazareth. Those in the inside wanted nothing to do with the grace of God for those on the outside. It was like a lit match was thrown on a dry field; there was an explosion of fiery anger that rapidly spread across that group of men. They had a nice, neat fix on how things should be: who God was, how salvation worked, and who was in and who was out. And Jesus dared to turn all of that upside down using their own scriptures. And growing up in Nazareth, they thought Jesus should know better. The disappointment "added fuel to the fire."

There was a cliff outside of Nazareth with rocks at the bottom of it. Jesus was roughly taken there. There were shouts of "throw him off." Loudmouths always seem to find false courage in the safety of a crowd. But in all the hubbub Jesus just passed through the crowd. Indeed, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown." And Jesus began the ministry prophesied in Isaiah. But not in Nazareth.

And so that's the trailer of Luke's Jesus story. He tells us that Jesus honors the traditions but is more than the traditions. He tells us that God's salvation was prophesied, but it's still full of surprises. He tells us that God's salvation is for Israel, and for more than Israel. He tells us that there will be joyful acceptance, and there will be angry rejection. And so we wonder, how will this story of Jesus go?

III. Brief Theological Reflection

There's a story I found myself pondering this week. I think about it every once in a while. This is the story.

A handful of monks in a monastery were awakened one night with the loud sound of pounding. They got up and followed the sound to the monastery crypt. Earlier that week they had buried a deceased brother there. And the sound was coming from his crypt. Alarmed, they opened the crypt.

And what they saw was that their brother was now very much alive. He slid out of the crypt and said: "Brothers, I have been to the other side. I've been to heaven. I've seen God and Jesus and eternal life. And it's nothing like what we've been taught and what we teach. We have to change. We have to change what we believe. We have to change what we teach. We have to change our dreams and hopes and imaginations. It's more than we imagine."

None of the brothers said anything. They just stood there silently pondering what they had just heard. Then without saying a word they all put their brother back in the crypt and went back to bed. They weren't ready for change.

That's what's going on in this "trailer" in Luke. They weren't ready for change. So they rejected God plan and God's salvation and God's Savior. And they will miss much of what God is doing.

On Wednesday morning a little more than a week ago we discussed this story in Luke in our men's group. And part of that discussion was about the challenge and necessity of holding onto both faith and humility. On the one hand we need faith to believe in. But on the other hand, we need a humility because how could we really know the fullness of God's plan and salvation? We are human, and not God. So it's balancing faith and humility. Too much on the faith side and we get proud and self-righteous. Too much on the humility side and we really don't have much to trust and believe. I think the wisdom of Christian faith knows it's a balance. And that balance leaves room for change. The balance of faith and humility; that's what the brothers in the monastery needed, what the men in the synagogue in Nazareth needed, and what we need.

I have found it helpful and wise to think of my Christian faith as "AN answer" but not "THE answer." "AN answer" gives me something to seriously believe and trust and hope in and live and share. But there's still a humility to leave room for the way and will of God, which is much more than I could ever know. It leaves room for change. "An answer;" you also might find that helpful. It balances faith and humility.

"An answer." Luke's trailer is telling us that the prophesied salvation of God is the grace and power of God in Jesus Christ to bring healing and hope to our lives. It's for the poor, captives, blind, and oppressed. It's for those in our hometown and in other towns. It's for Jews and gentiles, gays and lesbians and straights, red and yellow black and while, right wing and left wind and no wing. It's for folks like us and for folks not like us at all. Amen to all of that.