

**A Safe Place**  
**January 30, 2022**

Luke 4: 21-30

*Jesus has just read aloud from the scroll in the synagogue and announced his mission to bring mercy and justice and healing and to proclaim the year of the Lord.*

<sup>21</sup>Then he said to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

<sup>22</sup>All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

<sup>23</sup>He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’”

<sup>24</sup>And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. <sup>25</sup>But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; <sup>26</sup>yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath (Zare-a-fath) in Sidon.

<sup>27</sup>There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

<sup>28</sup>When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup>They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

<sup>30</sup>But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

I went to the movies this week.

It was the first time in two years

That I felt safe to go

It was wonderful.

There were reclining seats.

All 4 of us in the theatre were masked.

This song, "Somewhere" was particularly moving  
For it speaks of a longing for a place  
Where there is forgiveness, and peace  
And openness.  
A safe place.

It is such a deep human need  
One that has been hard to fulfill  
These past two years  
Physically, emotionally, politically,  
Even spiritually.  
For the places we had thought we might be safe  
Haven't been.  
We sense that in our scriptures today:

Jesus has just read from Isaiah  
Announced that he is here to fulfill the scriptures  
To bring sight to the blind  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed  
To proclaim the year acceptable to God

His hometown folks were so impressed  
*Isn't that Joseph's boy, they say admiringly*  
That one of them would become such a prophet  
Is such a mitzvah! Such a blessing!

A Jewish professor of mine used to say.  
*We Jews are secretly proud of Jesus*  
*He was a good Jewish boy*  
*Who made the big time!*

So, the folks in Jesus' home town  
Seem to be pretty proud of him,  
But then he decides to speak the truth  
That he knew,  
having been raised there

would be hardest for his townsfolk to hear:

He prefaces it by saying,

Prophets are not welcome in their hometown,  
Then tells of the stories of the prophets and outsiders

Of the poor Gentile widow in Sidon  
who was so faithful  
That at Elijah's request  
Gave him her last bit of food

And of Naaman, the commander in the Syrian army  
Who humbled himself and received healing  
through Elijah's successor, Elisha

Jesus was telling them that  
They aren't the only favored ones.  
That told them that God doesn't only love, heal, save  
Israelites or people who believe as they do.  
Indeed, there are no outsiders  
the sides you've drawn are your own creation

And they felt betrayed  
Decide to throw him off a cliff,  
because he wasn't who  
They thought he was

They thought he was theirs  
He was everyone's.  
They thought God was theirs  
God is everyone's.

There's a series called *Somebody, Somewhere*,  
Sam has come back to her hometown, .  
She is funny, cynical, grieving her sister  
Her family life is a minefield,

Her boss at work doesn't understand her.  
She is on the outside looking in  
doesn't fit in anywhere or with anyone.  
And she's gotten comfortable with that,  
Sort of.

Then a man named Joel befriends her  
invites her to "Choir Practice"  
No, she says, I'm not a church person.  
It's more "*church adjacent*" he says,  
The Presbyterian Church lets him have space  
For a gathering – for songs and truthful storytelling  
And when Sam gets there  
She sees a mix of people from town  
Queer folk like Joel, are leading,  
but there are people from work  
From her own family,  
People she realizes also need a safe place to be themselves.

*Why meet in a church?*  
says one of the queer folks to Joel,  
*it's freaking me out.*  
and Joel,  
*A lot of people tell me that, he says,*  
*But for all the other times I have felt excluded*  
*This is still where I feel the most comfort*

Joel asks Sam asked to sing with him,  
And you know how vulnerable it feels to sing  
especially in front of those who know you.  
But she stands up in front of the cross  
And he sings to her about not giving up  
And she sings about the river that keeps flowing.  
That river of hope,  
Her deep authentic self, keeps flowing.

A member of this community named Jeanette,

Has been pondering this things deeply  
And she wrote to me this week:

*The only way I know to risk is to be my authentic self  
which I have hidden,  
like that light kept under the bushel basket,  
to keep it burning.  
My authentic self is full of pot holes, ditches,  
skid marks, and persistence.  
It's full of wonder and excitement and love  
and disappointment.  
It's full of advocating and being brave for others  
but not so much for myself.  
It's full of doubts about myself,  
hiding and coming out,*

This community has chosen as a core value  
*To be a Safe Place to Question, Seek,  
Grow and Demonstrate  
Who we are in Christ*

Creating a safe space for people to be and become  
Our authentic selves  
Me included, and you,  
To ask our questions,  
To seek, to demonstrate  
Christ's work in us,  
All of us, like our friend,  
*full of pot holes, ditches,  
skid marks, and persistence.  
full of wonder and excitement and love  
and disappointment  
full of bravery and fear*

Of course the gospel isn't safe,  
Lord, no!  
We might not get pushed off a cliff,

But, my gosh, what Jesus asks of us:

*Love our enemy*

*Forgive not seven times but seventy times seven  
And live understanding that the first are last  
And the last are first.*

The boundaries between us are of our own making, Jesus says,  
God, the spirit of the universe  
Has loved everything into being  
Including those who have hurt us or others,  
As much as God loves us

His hometown folks thought that makes us less beloved  
With a smaller place in God's heart

But that shows us how Jesus words are about us  
we who need to not only our neighbor and our enemy  
but ourselves  
and forgive ourselves as God forgive us  
for not being who we think we ought to be by now.

That sort of forgiveness, that sort of love  
That sort of space where the boundaries between us  
And within us Are down is what we long for,  
What the world longs for.

In the new version of West Side Story,  
The people of this city, and Tony and Maria,  
the Romeo and Juliet of the story  
Are caught up in the retributive violence  
of their times and ours.

No one is safe.

The shop owner who has known all these young people  
From both sides of the racial and cultural divide  
She Has been told that Maria has been killed  
And

She sits at a table  
and sings Somewhere,  
It is a lament,  
for all that love that gets lost among us and between  
It is a song of longing  
for a place where all belong.  
It is a song of hope, that  
We'll find a new way of living,  
We'll find a way of forgiving  
Somewhere.

May it be so. Amen.

Rev. Patricia Wagner, Maple Grove UMC