

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.

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

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

²³He 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.’”

²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵But 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; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath (Zare-a-fath) in Sidon.

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

²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They 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.

³⁰But 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