

Enraging good news

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Jesus, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and still wet from his baptism, comes back to his home synagogue, publicly claims that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophesy, and is praised by everyone. Then, within five verses, everyone in the synagogue is filled with rage. They drive him out of town so that they might hurl him off a cliff.

What happened? After the reading and commentary, Jesus argues that—as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be—God's good news is for the most vulnerable. This is hard to hear when you're the rich one dressed in fine purple linen, passing by the poor man Lazarus covered in sores and begging to eat the scraps of food that fall from your table.

But just as God favored the widow at Zarephath in Sidon over the widows in Israel, just as God healed Naaman the Syrian even though there were many lepers in Israel, Father Abraham had mercy on Lazarus, the vulnerable outsider whose only company was the dogs who would come to lick his sores.

What's striking about both of these passages in Luke is how challenging it is to hear God's good news. The rich man who remained deaf to the good news all his life begs Abraham to go back and to warn his brothers, but Abraham replies, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them."

Similarly, the people in Jesus' hometown synagogue have story after story in their tradition; they have Isaiah, Moses, and all of the prophets; they even have God wrapped up in flesh, Jesus of Nazareth. And so do we. And yet we don't listen. We

domesticate the gospel into some other message. We pass by on the other side.

Reading Luke 4, the temptation is to shake our heads at the Nazarenes—but we ought to read the story as a sobering warning directed at us, a cautionary tale akin to the story of Lazarus and the rich man. The gospel is challenging, provocative and sometimes downright enraging. It convicts us all. But therein lies its transformative power: humbling us to confession, luring us toward freedom, encouraging us to wrestle and search—so that, in the end, we might arise, shine and live fully human lives.