



MARCH 11/12, 2023

2023 LENTEN SERMON SERIES

ATTEMPTED

MURDER

SO THEY TRIED
TO KILL JESUS

PART 2

LUKE 4:16-30

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Date: March 11 and 12, 2023
Preacher: Rev. Howard-John Wesley
Sermon Title: Lenten Series, Part II: Attempted Murder
Scripture: Luke 4:16-30 (NIV)

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the city was built to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

SERMON SUMMARY

In the 4th chapter of Luke, we encounter another attempt on Jesus' life. This time, not the Pharisees but the people of Jesus' hometown plot his murder. When Jesus returns to Nazareth, his star is rising; his acclaim is growing. "As was his custom," upon arriving home, Jesus attended Synagogue. There he is chosen to read a passage of scripture. The passage handed to Jesus was Isaiah 61:1-2. After reading the text, he announces that this scripture was fulfilled in their hearing today. The people were amazed and spoke well of him until he pointed out that the blessings of good news, freedom, sight, and liberty were meant for those **beyond Nazareth and the household of Israel.**

Once the people realized their hometown boy was prophesying blessings not meant for them, they grew angry and sought to kill him. In particular, Jesus' words from Isaiah, I Kings (widow of Zarephath/Elijah), and II Kings (Naaman/Elisha) point out:

- The Isaiah scroll is not just about the Jewish people.
- The people are wrong about God's willingness to bless only Israel.
- God's grace cannot be limited, and God will bless whom God chooses.
- Those with privilege must acknowledge it and not seek to play a victim's role.

At the end of this Biblical story, we learn Jesus walks straight through the crowd trying to kill him. Pastor Wesley reminds us that even when we cannot see our way through a difficult situation, God is able to keep us safe. Even when we do not know how, we know that God can keep us. And for this, we rejoice.

KEY POINTS

- Isaiah 61:1-2 contains the core focus of Jesus' earthly ministry.
- The people of Nazareth were angry and ready to kill Jesus because they realized:
 - Jesus pointed out that it was not all about them.
 - They were wrong about God, and Jesus used scripture to point this out.
 - They were addicted to being right and could not stomach Jesus' correction, and they could not confine God's grace to their community.
- This sermon teaches several lessons:
 - We must be careful not to place God in a box.
 - God will bless whom he chooses. He is not limited in the ability to bless.
 - God is bigger than any of our thoughts/expectations about the divine.
 - We cannot confine God's grace.
 - The people in Nazareth had privilege, as defined by access + expectation + entitlement = privilege.
 - Privilege always believes that things will break in your favor and cannot accept it when it does not.
- We must "Never trust a portrait of God that is painted in one color!" God is multivalent and multifaceted. When others insist on describing God through the lens of one verse, author, or book of the Bible, we must ask what else in the Bible corroborates the point, or what does Jesus have to say about it all?

Village Members and Facilitators,

The Curriculum Team does not expect you to cover all the questions.

We ask facilitators to choose the best questions for your Village from each section.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

1. Can you return to those places where people know you best, your hometown? What is your experience of going back to your Nazareth?

2. Luke chapter 4 points out that Jesus went into the synagogue “as was his custom.” Pastor Wesley invites us to hang out for a while with the thought that Jesus went to church. If you attend church online, what do you gain? What do you lose? If you attend church in person, what do you gain? What do you lose?

INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-2 in the Luke 4 passage, but he leaves out a line from Isaiah 61:2. In his treatment of the Isaiah text, he excludes, “and the day of vengeance of our God.” Why do you think Jesus leaves out talk about God’s vengeance? What is unique about the ministry of Jesus that might cause him to leave this line out of his use of Isaiah 61?
2. In what other places does the New Testament (NT) quote the Old Testament (OT)? Can you think of any other references? *Holy Hint, Isaiah, and the Psalms are the most often cited.* Share any OT references that you can locate in the NT.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. As Pastor Wesley unpacks the Luke 4 text, we learn that two of Israel’s significant prophets, Elijah (I Kings 17:7-16) and Elisha (II Kings 5), pronounce blessings for Gentiles (respectively the widow and Zarephath and Naaman, the Syrian general). Have you ever struggled with God blessing someone outside of your circle? Have you ever struggled with God blessing someone whom you saw as undeserving? Why did this cause you to struggle? What did you learn from your struggle?
2. It has been said that Isaiah 61: 1-2 captures the essence of the central core of Jesus’ earthly ministry. According to this text, he has come to do what is noted below. If this is Jesus’ mission statement, what is your mission statement as a Christian? At this point in your life, what is God calling you, uniquely, to do in the world? Finish this statement, *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me to . . .*
The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor. Isaiah 61:1-2a

3. Luke 4:29 says that when the angry mob in Nazareth seized Jesus and tried to throw him over a cliff to kill him, Jesus was able to walk right past them to safety. The scriptures don't explain how Jesus got away. Have you ever been cornered by your enemies or faced some seemingly insurmountable challenge, but somehow you managed to escape or overcome the challenge? What or who pulled you back from the edge of the cliff or made a way when you thought there was no way? How did your experience affect your faith in God?

4. In this sermon, we hear the phrase "addicted to being right." The people of Nazareth are sure Jesus is using Isaiah 61:1-2 to talk about blessings for them. When they find out they are wrong, they turn against Jesus. Their addiction to being right sends them into a frenzy and foolishness. Any addiction, when challenged, sends us off the deep end. To what are you addicted? What challenges in your life send you into a frenzy or foolishness?

5. Jesus' use of Isaiah 61 points out to those in Nazareth that they are wrong about God. According to this sermon, challenging someone's understanding of God is likely to make them angry and cause you to pay a price. Have you ever challenged someone's thinking about God? Has your understanding of God ever been challenged? What emotions came up for you or the other person? What price, if any, did you pay? What did you learn from this experience?

"CAN I PUSH IT?" QUESTIONS? |

1. Pastor Wesley reminds us that the folks in Nazareth did not like being decentered, as Jesus tells the story of God extending blessings to others. Currently, in America, the dominant population is being challenged to decenter whiteness as the primary American story. How do you feel about expanding the rich, complex, troubling, and fuller understanding of American history? Should it occur? At what age should students be exposed to the deeper American story?

2. What is your definition of grace? Why are we unable to confine God's grace? And if, as Christians, we were committed to extending grace in the world, how would we impact racism, homophobia, sexism, ageism, and whatever other isms you can think of? What's stopping us?

3. While examining Jesus' encounter with the Jews of Nazareth, Pastor Wesley said it's clear that you cannot live in privilege and pretend to be a victim. You cannot operate in entitlement, expectation, and access and then claim the victims' rights. Do you think feuds among celebrities in the news today (i.e., members of the Royal Family, Will Smith and Chris Rock, prosecutors and the January 6th insurrectionists, etc.) are present-day examples of the privileged masquerading as the victim? If so, why? If not, why not?

ACTIVITY

Pastor Wesley reminds us, "Never trust a portrait of God painted in one color." Why is this important? Isn't God love? What are the colors (aspects) with which we must paint God? Spend some time in your Village describing the palate of attributes necessary to create a fuller picture of God.

SPIRIT WORK

As Pastor Wesley instructs us in the order of service for Jesus' Synagogue, he mentions the Amidah, the ***Eighteen Prayers***. These prayers are the 18 original prayers, plus one, Jews pray each day. More information about Amidah can be found in the resource section. Are there any prayers you pray each day? What are they? Why are these your daily offering before God? Please list 3 - 5 short prayers you would like to begin to pray each day and place them where you can remember and practice them throughout the season of Lent.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Within the structure of Village, there are various affinity groups.

Each week the team creates questions specifically for these individual groups.

However, any village may draw from the questions listed below if the Spirit so moves.

For Married Couples

1. In your marriage, recall when you had to admit you were wrong. How did that go? Was it easy or hard for you? Did you do any of the things the sermon listed (i.e., deflect, lie, double down) to soften or try to get out of being wrong? Can an admission of being wrong strengthen your marriage? If so, how?
2. This sermon points out that people can get angry when they learn that attention has turned away from them. In marriage, attention is often turned to work, children,

community engagements, and other aspects of life. In fact, in marriage, it is rarely all about “you.” How might you consider balancing the energy of your marriage to have “me time,” “us time,” and other times so that anger is not the result of attention being turned elsewhere?

For Young Adults

1. According to this sermon, the same crowd who lifts you one day can call for your life the next. Has someone ever turned on you? What happened in your heart when they turned? And, before we leave this discussion, have you ever turned on anyone? What was that about?
2. “Grace is bigger than your definition of sin.” What does this statement mean to you? When has God’s grace been bigger than your sin? When has God’s grace called you to forgive someone else whose sin, at the time, seems more significant than grace? Were you able to offer forgiveness to this person? Is the event of offering grace still in progress?

For Parents

1. Diversity is not new, and even Jesus advocated for the inclusion of the “other.” How do you teach your children that God loves all people and that diversity is not only good but, according to our faith, is a necessary part of the plan?
2. Being addicted to being right is raised in this sermon as a problem. As a parent, are you addicted to being right? Have you ever acknowledged to your children that you were wrong about something? What do you think you modeled before them by that act? Was that positive or negative?

For Seniors

1. Pastor Wesley reminds us that when we limit our theology to a single passage, author, or book of the Bible, we are likely to misinterpret the Bible. We must always ask, of any text, what does Jesus teach, and how does this align with the entirety of the biblical text? Have you ever been subjected to someone “cherry-picking” a text and using it out of context? What did you do? How did you respond?
2. “Life is littered with folk who literally believe that everything ought to revolve around their needs.” Do you know people who fit this description? How do you experience them? How do you work with them? Have you ever been this person?

For Women

1. As believers, we are called to be gracious and kind to others. But sometimes things seem to go well for them but not for us. How do you handle it when the grace of God is poured out on others but not on you?
2. In this sermon, Jesus points out that Nazareen’s view of God was wrong. Have you ever realized that your view of God was too small or limited? Have you ever been wrong about God? How did you discover this error? Were you angry? How did you begin to revise your view of God? How has this shifted who you are in your faith?

For Men

1. Think about the most important role models in your life. Were any of them addicted to being right? If so, did you follow in their footsteps? What is the burden of being addicted to being right? How does one begin to overcome the addiction to being right?
2. Privilege = access + entitlement + expectation. In what ways are you privileged? In what ways have you behaved as if you are not privileged? How have you wasted your privilege? Now that you can name ways you are privileged, what will you do with your privilege going forward?

For Returning Citizens

1. Jesus returns to his hometown, and at first, he is celebrated, but then the mob turns against him. When you returned home after being incarcerated, how were you received? How have you used your post-incarcerated experience to guide you?
2. This weekend's sermon challenges us to "see God in places where [others] have excluded God." Based on your life, has God ever shown up in an unlikely place, extending grace beyond what you imagined was possible? Where did God show up? What did God's arrival in this place teach you about the love and presence of God?

For Differently-Abled Persons/People

1. "Life is littered with folk who believe everything ought to revolve around them." Do you know people who fit this description? How do you experience them? Have you been able to help them see you?
2. In this sermon, we hear the story of two brothers, one who struggled to celebrate the other. Have you ever had a hard time celebrating people who have God's grace in their lives? Why was this hard for you? If you were able to celebrate them, how did you overcome the struggle? What do you think God was teaching you through this experience?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Pastor Wesley notes an order of service for a 1st-century Synagogue. He lists the following items. For more information, please see the links below.
 - a. The Shema
 - i. *Shema Yisrael* is a Jewish prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. Its first verse encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism: "Hear, O Israel: YHWH is our God, YHWH is one," found in Deuteronomy 6:4.
 - b. Decalogue
 - i. The Ten Commandments, also known as the Ten Words. They appear twice in the Hebrew Bible.
 1. Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5
 - c. Amidah

