

## “THE NAZARETH NON SEQUITURS”

A Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, January 31, 2016

Text: Luke 4:21-30

Last week we heard Jesus announce in Nazareth that the spirit of the Lord was upon him . . . because the Lord had anointed him to “bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” The audience loved it. “Let’s hear it for Jesus!” They were proud of him. “Is this not Joseph’s son?” “Hurrah!”

Someone may even have said, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!”

But then he said something that sounds to us like a non sequitur. It did not seem an appropriate response to the applause they were offering.

He read their minds and put words in their mouths. Puzzling words, even obnoxious. He said “I’m sure **you’re** all thinking ‘Physician, cure yourself!’” And he said: “**You** will say ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’”

Maybe he captured what they were saying, or maybe he didn’t. Whatever was the case, the conversation now started to not make sense. They were loving what he was saying, expressing their pride in him; yet instead of thanking them all for their appreciation and for helping him grow up, he said those two odd things. Actually, the second one does make sense—do here what you did elsewhere—but the first one does not—Physician, heal yourself! Had they said or done anything to indicate they thought he himself was sick?

As if that were not enough, he proceeded to pour gasoline on the fire by reminding them of two times in Israel’s history when the people of Israel were snubbed by God.

That did it. “When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.”

But that is another non sequitur. Why should they be so touchy? Those *were* Bible stories, right? But in their rage, they drove Jesus out of 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.

. . .

The story of those non sequiturs is actually the story of a contest in Nazareth.

For us, who know about the crucifixion of Jesus, there is an eerie similarity between the Nazareth situation and another a few years later in Jerusalem, when he was taken out of town (again) to a hill (again) to be killed (again, and that time successfully). When the people arrested Jesus, they even asked him about his Nazareth declaration. “If you are the anointed one (the Messiah), tell **us**—we want to hear for ourselves.”

The key similarity is this: the issue, both times, was salvation. Both sides were in favor of salvation. Jesus wanted the world to be saved. The world wanted to be saved. In fact, they killed Jesus *in order to save the world from what Jesus was doing*. To save the world from someone whose very name meant “savior.”

Was this contest in Nazareth just a case of misunderstanding? Were those non sequiturs at Nazareth the result of people just not getting what Jesus was trying to tell them?

Perhaps at first they did not understand. But it was when they *did* understand that it turned into a conflict, leading to an attempt on Jesus' life.

Let's review:

Jesus said, "I am anointed to proclaim good news to the poor/blind/captive/oppressed."

They thought, "that's great."

Then he said one thing after another which made them realize he was talking *about them*. At the point when the people realized he was calling *them* "poor blind captives," that is when they stopped liking him. He called them that because they were. He called them that because they needed to see themselves as God saw them. He called them "poor blind captives" because until they saw the truth about themselves he couldn't help them. Just as when Israel, back in OT days, had sometimes refused to hear the word of God, the drought of God's word corresponded to an increase of every sort of poverty in their lives—so now, the self-satisfied of Nazareth were in fact in need of a healing which they didn't think they needed.

Let me relate this sticking point in their conversation to the Lord's Prayer.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray "Your will be done." In ordinary prayer, we don't pray like that. We pray "Our will be done." "Fix what I want fixed, heal what I want healed, and leave the rest of me alone to do as I please."

When we recite the prayer, the accent and therefore the emphasis falls on the word "done." We say "Hallowed be thy **name**, thy kingdom **come**, thy will be **done**."

But in Greek the emphasis falls on the word "your" or "of you," as the last word in each petition.

Thus:

ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου.  
Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου.  
Γεινηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου

Or

Be hallowed the name **of you**.  
Let it come the kingdom **of you**.  
May be done the will **of you**.

The "new information," the emphasis in each of those petitions is not "name," "kingdom," "will," Those are the topics. The "new information" is the genitive case of the singular personal pronoun "**you**."

That is what the contest was about at Nazareth. The people wanted Jesus to fit his power into their will, not the other way around. They wanted to fold Jesus' will into their will, instead of folding their plans and their lives into the will of Jesus.

The world—and Nazareth only serves as an example to us—thought this way about Jesus: well, it's nice that he can mass produce bread and heal blind people and maybe he can do some other good things for us, according to our plans. Here at Nazareth as he did elsewhere. But meanwhile the world was not willing to let go of its infernal habit of treating one another badly to get whatever they wanted; drawing boundaries and killing each other. "God, take care of us."

The world is accustomed to using people for its *own* purposes, rather than using itself for God's purposes. That's a huge shift. Night and day. When Jesus said "What I was anointed to do is being fulfilled in your hearing me proclaim it," he was not saying that he intended to go find poor people somewhere else and tell them good news. He was saying that *they* were poor people who needed the wealth he was going to offer them, the light they needed for their eyes, the freedom they really needed.

It took them a minute to figure out what he was implying. They really wanted Jesus to be a hero. They did want him to do among them the things he had done elsewhere. He was in fact, **as they saw it**, nothing but Joseph's son. They thought things were going to be great having Jesus on their team. They could keep the same coach and general manager; it would just be great to have an actual MVP for a change.

But when Jesus proclaimed good news to them, he meant real good news, not just an improvement of conditions. He meant that the Kingdom of God was being brought to every villager in Galilee and even beyond Galilee. God's miracles would not be done as an expedient, to make things a little better for a few favorites of God. This would amount to *global* favoritism, which is not favoritism. God's Spirit would be poured out. Dreams were coming, visions were on their way. The dead would rise.

Nazareth wasn't ready for that. They wanted to fold Jesus into their own plans. They did not want to be folded into God's plan. They were not ready to pray "Your will be done." They wanted their will to be done; they just wanted life to hurt a little less.

So in a rage they drove Jesus out of town and led him to the brow of a hill so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

A couple years later, when it was even more clear to even more people how radically different the kingship of Jesus would be, another crowd would drive him out of town and take him to the brow of another hill so that they might hang him on a cross.

Back at Nazareth, Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

At Jerusalem, Jesus died and was buried, but rose again and passed through the midst of them and went on his way. **His** way.

Today, we open our hands to receive Jesus' body and blood. Not so they can help us be the people we already are, but so we can become what the anointed one is making us—free and rich people who live to give thanks to God for coming among us, now and evermore.

Amen.