

Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

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

In our scripture for today, Jesus is about thirty years old. He's left home like all young adults tend to do. He's been baptized in the Jordan River, spent 40 days in the wilderness battling temptations, and he's circling back, like young adults do, to have his mom do his laundry and eat some free home cooking before he heads out to recruit his disciples and travel the countryside.

But as Thomas Wolfe says in his 1940s novel, you can never go home again. You change. The community changes. Nothing stays the same.

Jesus has the Holy Spirit now. God has spoken to him from the heavens. He's faced the devil. Something inside him has shifted. But what? How different is the man Jesus compared to the child Jesus?

I want to take a minute to think about the community that Jesus grew up in. We don't spend much time thinking about Jesus as a boy. We have one story. One. It's about Jesus at the age of twelve. He travels with his family and what is called a large group of travelers – likely neighbors, friends, and extended family. And after they celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, the group heads home, but Jesus is not among them. For three days, he's missing. At least three days. Can you imagine what that must have been like for his parents for the group? The panic and guilt?

When they find him, he's in the temple of all places. Exactly where you think a twelve-year-old boy would be, right? Not the comic book store. Not the video arcade. Not the candy shop. The temple. And not only is he at the temple, but he's amazing the wise elders by explaining things to them and asking them questions and quoting scripture. And when his parents say, "Why have you treated us like this, we've been so anxious," he says in a voice that I think sounds a bit like a smart aleck, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

At which point I can imagine Joseph's eyes get wide and the vein in his forehead might have started thumping, and he might have said something like, "I may not be your father, but you're going to be grounded in MY house until you're old enough to turn water into wine!"

For some reason, the Bible never includes any words of Joseph. Probably for the best. I know if I disappeared on my dad, he'd have given me an earful that he wouldn't have wanted recorded for all eternity.

But you can imagine that from that point on, after Jesus got home and Mary and Joseph debated about whether to ground him or ground themselves for being bad parents to God's son, the whole town heard about it. All of Nazareth got wind of the kid who disappeared in Jerusalem for days.

You may be wondering, why are you talking about the story of Jesus in the Temple. That's Luke 3, not our scripture from Luke 4, but my point is, we don't know any more about his childhood. There were no such thing as teenage years back then, but we do know that all children, and likely even the Son of God, go through phases in life in which they test boundaries, challenge authority, and become increasingly independent.

What was Jesus like then? What did his neighbors think of him? What did the kids in his Hebrew class think? Did he play soccer until the sun went down on the Sabbath? And if he did, could he bend it like Beckham by commanding the wind to put a spin on the ball? Was he funny? Was he clumsy as kids can be when they go through growth spurts? Did his voice squeak when he hit puberty? Did he hit Joseph's thumb with the hammer as he learned carpentry skills?

On a somber note, scholars believe that it's likely that his devoted stepfather Joseph died before Jesus began his public ministry, so I wonder, how did that grief affect him? How did the village of Nazareth show up for Mary and Jesus and the rest of the family when that happened?

I wonder, because the people of Nazareth got to know Jesus like we know the children of Dunn's Corners. We anticipate their births, celebrate their baptisms, watch them grow, and laugh at the amazing things they say during children's moments. We learn about their interests and hobbies. For example, Anderson is playing his first season of basketball this year. Devlin just turned 13. Eli and Luke are scouts. Hannah and Donna Jo are ready to start a children's choir at church whether we're ready for it or not!

We have the privilege of being a family of faith to these children. We get to see them behave and misbehave. We take note of the changes over the years. We marvel at how the children who were angels and shepherds in the Christmas Pageant one year outgrow those

costumes in future years, so they become the magi and have speaking roles in the pageant, and eventually they come home from college and light the advent candles themselves because they're five foot nine and can reach the wicks without any help thank you very much.

But then, those children go off college or take a gap year and travel and they start getting wild ideas. They might come home with a tattoo or a piercing or a significant other who wants to live on the other side of the world.

The scripture says that at first, the people gathered in the synagogue were amazed. They said to themselves, "Is this not Joseph's son?" And I imagine they are remembering the days when little Jesus helped Joseph make their dinner table. To them, Jesus is not Jesus the Christ but Jesus, Joseph's son, and at first, they're impressed.

Rumor of his work in the region has preceded him. But now I want to read a few more verses from Luke 4 to you. 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.'" ²⁴And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his 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 in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many with a skin disease 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.

This also is the difficult word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The boy they knew. The boy they had affection for. The one they were impressed with. Mary and Joseph's son was now speaking in such a way that they were filled with rage and ready to throw him off the cliff. What on earth happened? What could have triggered them so aggressively?

There's a modern day example of this that I want to share with you. Back in the 90s and 2000s, I was a huge fan of Contemporary Christian music. Concerts, CDs, t-shirts. I was all about it. And it was a booming genre. There were ballads, worship songs, rappers, and hip-hop artists all representing Christianity. This white girl in Alabama was rapping about Jesus, and, yeah, it was weird. But this artist named Lecrae was bringing Jesus to life the way Lin Manuel-Miranda brought Hamilton to life. For a whole generation of Christian youth, Jesus was cool. Lecrae even got to perform on The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon.

Professor Leah Schade of Lexington Theological Seminary writes, "Lecrae had been the darling of the evangelical world [for several years], selling millions of albums and selling out huge venues. 'He was mentored and supported by several white Christian pastors and leaders who saw his positive message and popularity as a way to reach youth.'³

But on July 4, 2016, he put out a tweet, "This is what my family was doing in 1776," with a picture of slaves picking cotton. What he said was the truth. But he was drawing attention to the racist history of his country, a history that most white evangelicals refuse to acknowledge or address. In retaliation, the white church, in a sense, threw him—or at least his career—off a cliff. People stopped buying his albums and attending his concerts. He lost tens of thousands of social media followers. His white mentors abandoned him. All of this because he cared "for the plight of the disenfranchised and the racial minorities in the country." And it was (quote) "very disheartening."

In the same way, the people of Nazareth, at first, were amazed at Jesus' words. They were hoping their hometown boy could be the Messiah, but then he said that God's love is for all the world. God's love is for the Jewish people but not exclusively the Jewish people. God will sometimes bless people who aren't like us rather than us, and they got upset. They turned on Jesus in a heartbeat. They were ready to stop his heartbeat.

Somehow, we don't know quite how, Jesus passed through the midst of the mob and went on his way. Lecrae has passed through the mob, too, and is still rapping about the love of God, but both men were deeply hurt by the people they knew best.

Sometimes, when people speak to us, and we get uncomfortable. We lash out rather than reflect on our own reactions and examine our own hearts. We deny the truth, or we get defensive because we feel attacked, but sometimes truth is truth and morality is morality and God's love is God's love.

My question for you today is, what do we do if one of our sweet Dunn's Corners kiddos comes home from a stint in the Peace Corps and declares that the American way of capitalism is evil and that it's time for a change? Or what if they come home and say the criminal justice system is unjust and the church needs to join them in a public demonstration? What if one of them comes back from teaching in an inner city and decries the segregation and financial disparity in public education and says it's time to do something about it?

Will you be amazed at the young adult who is calling for justice or will you see the child that young lady used to be? Will the fact that you saw her at her most awkward preteen moments, during her goth phase when she wore all black and dyed her hair and wore black lipstick get in the way of seeing her as a voice for God? Do those memories help you see him or her as a prophet or get in the way?

[At the 10 o'clock service, we will baptize/Today we baptized Caroline Longolucco.] We've been loving her since Sarah and Jake announced the pregnancy. We rejoiced at the news of her birth, and now we've baptized her into our family of faith. In thirty years, or twenty years, or even ten years, what could little Caroline ever say to us that would cause us to turn on her like the people of Nazareth turned on Jesus? Nothing. Not a thing, right? At least I pray so, but as one who has experienced spiritual anger, judgment, and rejection when I dared to suggest that God loved people the church considered unloveable and unredeemable . . . people like me . . . , I know it happens. It happens more often than we care to admit.

It's so ironic to me that what Jesus did to make the crowd mad was declare that the Year of the Lord's Favor had arrived. That God was about to do a great thing and was calling the faithful to join in and celebrate the radically gracious and godly concept of Jubilee

where debts are cancelled, land is restored to the poor, the environment is given a chance to rest and recover, and wealth is redistributed. It is a hopeful concept. It's lovely to think that God is ready to turn the page on the calendar and pour out blessing upon blessing on the people and the land and restore justice and combat poverty.

But if the Lord's Favor is poured out on the people you despise it becomes a bitter, stomach-turning, violence-enraging heresy.

The people of Nazareth didn't want to hear about God's love being given to those they considered "other." But the love of God has always been more global than we have wanted it to be. It is more concerned for the poor and oppressed than we realize. No race or nationality is outside of God's compassion, and that can be infuriating.

But let's bring it home again. Can you imagine, is there anything you could fathom, that Caroline could possibly say or do that in twenty to thirty years that would make you so angry? If you watch her grow up and celebrate her achievements and she comes back with a word of challenge, would you ever wish her any harm? Of course not. But friends, we've all been Nazarites. We've all been angered by something someone has said and cancelled our subscriptions, our relationships, our financial support, called them names like nasty or dumb. But sometimes its moments when we feel the most uncomfortable that the Spirit of God is trying the hardest to speak to us. So let's listen to the children, and the ones we knew as children, and don't attack the messenger, but wrestle with message. Amen.