

“Hot Buttons”

Sermon delivered 1/31/10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
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Luke 4:21–30

Then [Jesus] began to say to [all in the synagogue in Nazareth,] "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 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.

What is on your mind this morning? What baggage of fears, anxiety, excitement, anger, and concern did you bring here this morning? I would like to believe you brought everything with you this morning because you are a whole people, it is like thinking about work when you get home. We don't compartmentalize life into nice neat boxes. Coming to church this morning, you bring all that you are before God, who knows the depth of your soul. In many ways, we are like the folks gathered in Nazareth for worship when Jesus returned to his hometown. We are gathered here to hear the word of the Lord for our lives. Sometimes the Word is comforting and reassuring, and other times it is challenging and uncomfortable. As we have heard in the text this morning, the response of Jesus pushed the people of Nazareth to the edge of rage - and the desire to murder. What in our baggage of fears and anxieties would push our "hot button"?

Jesus pushed the "hot buttons" in his hometown of Nazareth after he read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He anointed me to preach the Good News to the poor...*" They all spoke well of him, and were amazed at the gracious words that came out of his mouth. There is a temptation to read, "*Is not this Joseph's son?*" as a rejection of him because he is a hometown boy, or maybe a put down, when in fact it is the opposite. The values at that time consisted of obligations, both to one's family, and also to the community. "*And you will say...*" is in the English version and not the Greek. This is important because "*Doctor, cure yourself*" means give us the good news, set us free, give sight to the blind, and set us free here and now, forget about

Capernaum. Why? Nazareth is in a counter-culture situation at the time, with the pagan influences of the Phoenicians to the south and west, Samaritans in the south, and Greeks to the west.

Jesus pushes the “hot buttons” when he retells the stories of Elijah and Elisha. He becomes, as he says, “*A prophet is without honor in his hometown*” with these stories. I don’t think it is the familiarity that breeds contempt here as much as Jesus knowing these people, and how to push their buttons. What was in these stories that produced the rage? What did he trigger in them? We probably don’t know what our hot buttons are until someone pushes them.

Elijah was a hero in his battle against the 400 priests and the pagan god Baal. Jesus doesn’t go for the heroic. He pushes that button, a hot button, all of the starving widows in Israel during the famine, the prophet Elijah was sent by God to the poor, “pagan” widow bypassing all the local “Jewish” widows. Elijah was sent by God to a Gentile, to an enemy. Like the other “hot button” he pushed with Naaman, a pagan leper who was cured by Elisha. So, what is the analogy he is making? Is he saying that God prefers pagans and Gentiles to his own chosen people? This is blasphemy. The punishment is death, for they were filled with rage. Jesus pushed the buttons.

Just imagine how we would feel, if one of our young people returned home from college/seminary as a recognized religious leader in the world, and after singing the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and *God Bless America*, spoke of God’s incredible love for the Muslims and the Buddhists, and said they were going to become a Hare Krishna. I wonder what conversations we would be having at coffee hour. I suspect some of our “hot buttons” would be activated.

In our tradition, as Lutherans, we push the hot buttons under the expression, “Law and Gospel”. The hot buttons we examine are where we have come up short of God’s expectations of us and then we turn to the cross of God’s saving love. Doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The truth is difficult for us to hear. The “hot buttons” need to be handled the way porcupines make love, very carefully! I struggle every week to balance the “law and Gospel” with questions like, what is the mission of this church? Do we exist for the sake of the membership, the Synod, Lutheranism, the world? Are we excited about reaching out to the unknown, the unfamiliar, and the unpredictable? The list of dangerous questions can go on and on. I don’t know if it would push us to rage. I think we vote with our feet, we just stay home or ignore what we don’t like, as the Word of the Lord coming to us.

This morning, let us sit in that congregation in Nazareth. Jesus isn’t talking about religion; personally I fail to see this as being a big issue among many of us Lutherans, unless you are from the Wisconsin Synod. What would be the “hot buttons” Jesus would be pushing for us? Would he quote Socrates, saying what is honored in a society is cultivated in a society? Then we ask what are we

cultivating in our homes, schools, and workplaces? Would Jesus look at us through the eyes of Psalm 127, *“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain...”* “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, (so much for Ben Franklin), *eating the bread of anxious toil....*” Would Jesus address the breaking of the housing bubble and all the other bubbles in our lives, the things that we put our faith in as we eat the bread of anxiety? What buttons would the Lord be pressing in your life today that would put you over the edge? You are hard working people, you have sacrificed and struggled to make your payments, keep your credit record clean, and do your duty. Let us admit we live in a world of “whatever makes you happy”, and “if it feels good, do it.” Do it because it feels good, makes you feel nice. What kind of houses have we built? I doubt Jesus is being a prophet because he wants people to feel bad. I think he wants them to be real by loving God and others.

If someone were to ask, “Who are you?” What would you say? How do you identify yourself? By what you do, where you live, where you are from, what you have, what you have accomplished? Identification is important to all of us. But it becomes a bubble that will break when it ends at retirement, pink slips, graduation, age, and death. When a life lived in achievement disappears, we disappear. We are all the same in death, when we return to the dust. We can’t say, “hey look at this speck of dust, it looks like Collins from Immanuel, no that isn’t Collins, that is Father Dave from St. Stephens.”

Jesus the Prophet, (we have no Lutheran Churches called Jesus the Prophet Lutheran Church) knows that the truth is hard to hear. It causes knots to tie up in our stomach. I don’t think any of the hot buttons of God’s love for the world have been pushed as much as the button of the world having more than we have. Few of us have suffered up until the recent years. When we look at the fragments of the broken pieces of our lives around of us, realizing the American Dream may never be realized for many, and the house of cards comes tumbling down, we get angry while we eat the bread of anxious toil. We are a nation of Ipads, I pods, I mac’s and I’s. This is the Law. Now what about the Gospel in all of this?

The Gospels move and point to what God is doing. In this text, God speaks of love for the world, all the folks are invited to the party! Wait, you can’t have a party if everyone is invited, it wouldn’t be any fun. The crowd wants to kill God by pushing him over the edge of the cliff, for not giving them what they wanted. We just ignore Him. What God does in this text is to walk through the people and goes to Capernaum. He passes through...their rage and hot buttons.

There was a billboard that read, “If God isn’t where you are, guess who moved?” The implication here is that we have moved. I can’t help but wondering if God doesn’t just pass through our lives in the midst of our bubbles as we build our homes on sand, and waits. Waits as we labor from early in the morning to late at night, eating the anxious bread of toil....waits for us as the Waiting Father in the

story eleven chapters from now, waiting for the Prodigal Son to come home, greeting him with a robe, a ring, and a party.

Faith is a journey of discovering what is true and not true for our lives in God, through Jesus Christ. The power of God is always at work in your life. Sometimes, like the folks at Nazareth, you get all of your buttons pushed by God, as an invitation to a new and different life. Stop, question, and examine those hot buttons and wonder, just wonder what the Word of the Lord is for your life. What new life is the Lord calling me to? Don't worry about offending the Lord, he passed through, and sits down the street waiting for you.