



Luke 4:28–30

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Reflection

Very few people like arguments and con-

frontation. And I think this is in part because of the ugliness that so often comes to the surface in times of conflict. For instance, have you ever noticed that some of the most violent reactions in arguments come out when a person is confronted with something about themselves that they know deep down to be true? And when their secret is brought to light, when they are exposed, when the weakness in their character or whatever it is that they are ashamed of is prodded their defensiveness goes to new extremes? And turning to ourselves, I think all of us probably know what it is to be at war with ourselves over some matter, only to make casualties of those around us who are guilty of nothing but speaking the truth in love.

In Luke 4, Jesus taps this raw nerve

amongst friends and relatives in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. And what surfaces is deep and ugly. Let me read this remarkable episode again in full, ending with the extraordinary turn of events in today's passage. Then we'll explore just what it is that has people who've known Jesus from his infancy attempting to murder him in 'hot' blood.

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 16 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, 17 and the scroll

of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 '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,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favour.'

20 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. 21 He began by saying to
them, 'Today this scripture is ful-

filled in your hearing.’ 22 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. 23 Jesus said to them, ‘Surely you will quote this proverb to me: “Physician, heal yourself!” And you will tell me, “Do here in your home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.”’ 24 ‘Truly I tell you,’ he continued, ‘no prophet is accepted in his home town. 25 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. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were

many in Israel with leprosy[g] in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian.’ 28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Jesus has become famous in Galilee. He is the news of the region and all are praising him for his preaching and his miracles. He’s invited to preach in his hometown synagogue and he doesn’t disappoint. At the conclusion of his sermon ‘all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gra-

cious words that came from his lips.' But then events take a turn. Blind familiarity takes over and something else. They want to see Jesus perform. Skeptical about the carpenter's son, Joseph's boy, claiming greatness, they're also jealous of the miracles he supposedly performed in Capernaum, and here's the rub, a city with a heavy non-Jewish population. They were God-fearing Jews, and this was Jesus' hometown, surely he had something much more special in order for God's chosen people?

And here we begin to tap that rich and deep vein of racism, the raw nerve deeply embedded in the first century Jewish psyche that sat inconsistently with God's word (that they professed to love so much) and yet was a hallmark of their culture. The

Jews hated the Gentiles. They despised non-Jews. They would not eat with them, they would cross to the other side of the road to avoid them, they considered them unclean. The great problem however in adopting this attitude was that their own Scriptures clearly stated that the Messiah would come as the saviour for *all people*, both Jew and Gentile alike. Even the foundational promises to their father Abraham predicted that all nations would be blessed through the Jewish nation. And right throughout their Scriptures, as uncomfortable as it must have been for them, were reminders that God's love and saving plan extends to people from every nation on earth. Which is why Jesus reminds them of two familiar stories from the Old Testament in which God overlooks Israel to extend his love and salvation to Gentiles.

And this is enough to make them crack. Their racism is exposed by their own Scriptures as indefensible in the sight of God. Jesus has exposed deeply embedded hypocrisy in their culture and traditions and they cannot handle it. Anger and violence is the last resort of people who are made to face a truth that they are not ready to accept. Unwilling to recognise or even consider the possibility of the error of their own tradition that they have so long defended and embraced; the accusing voice must be silenced.

And so Luke concludes his carefully selected introduction to Jesus with the people closest to him in the world, one moment praising his words and the next moment attempting to murder him as the truth of

his words exposes their hearts. An angry mob of neighbours, near relatives, childhood friends, people whose houses Jesus and his father had no doubt worked on using their carpentry skills, and people Jesus had worshipped with in synagogue week-in-week-out for the greater part of his early life move together to kill him. Imagine the son of God being murdered in a church! To throw someone against stones equated with the Old Testament punishment of stoning, yet this was a very thin judicial process at best, and much more like an angry lynch mob consisting of those formerly closest to Jesus in the world furiously attempting to murder him.

Think & Pray

Quite the introduction to Jesus by Luke.

We've see who Jesus is, what he's come to do, and how he'll be received by the Jewish nation who have wandered far from the word of God. But also a very insightful glimpse into the human heart. The Jews in Jesus hometown had fallen more in love with their culture and traditions than with the word of God. Their hypocrisy had become deeply embedded. Deep down knew that they were in error but hated the fact so much that they repressed the truth. And when one bold enough and loving enough to address the matter with them came along, in a heart beat they try and kill him to keep their secret sin covered up.

Spend some time today thinking about what Jesus would say to you in a similar situation. What Scriptures would Jesus

point out to you, parts of the Bible that you know are true, but desperately don't want to think about? And how would you react? How are you reacting? What inconsistencies in your life are you nurturing, what truth are you suppressing. Perhaps it's internet pornography, your eyes gliding right over all those verses about holiness. Maybe it's your anger that you indulge or your materialism, your happiness somehow tied to the clothes you buy. What deep-seated hypocrisy in your life would you violently defend if exposed? Have you fallen more in love with your culture and traditions than the word of God, so much so that you are willing to twist or overlook what you know to be true and have almost convinced yourself that there is no inconsistency?

Be honest with yourself in this today. Repent of your sin. And ask for God's help to refine you, to change your heart, to love his word and his truth and his son, more than this sin so that you can be free of it forever.