**Grounded in Faith**

**Epiphany 2 - Narrative Lectionary**

**January 15, 2017**

Luke 4: 14-30 Russell Mitchell-Walker

I grew up in a small church in Calgary whose average age, I was told, was 65. I was the only youth my age and the interview board for ministry, called me the golden haired boy of Southminster - that I could do no wrong and needed to find experiences that would challenge me. I left Calgary to train for ministry at the [Centre for Christian Studies](https://ccsonline.ca/) in 1984. During that time I came out to myself and a few others. Through the time period of 1986-92 the church had the somewhat turbulent discussions regarding sexual orientation and ministry, affirming in 1988 that sexual orientation was not a barrier to ministry. In the late 80’s or early 90’s the congregation I grew up in declared itself as a Community of Concern congregation – the opposite of being Affirming, stating they did not support and would never have a minister who was lesbian or gay. Although we knew we were not welcome for who we were there, Brian and I continued to attend Southminster whenever we visited my parents. I was never asked to preach there after I became a minister.

Jesus knew it would not be easy for him, coming back to his home town and going to Synagogue. He knew that his message and mission would challenge the people there, the people he grew up with. He came to the synagogue and chose the reading from Isaiah: the Spirit of the Lord is upon me… He was proclaiming his ministry through this reading and proclaimed it had been fulfilled in their hearing. It is important to note that Jesus omitted the verses after ‘the year of the Lord’s favour’ that read: *and the day of vengeance of our God*. Jesus’ message was one of peace, God wasn’t about vengeance. The gathered community were impressed and amazed at first and then the comment, isn’t this Joseph’s son, is actually an insult. Someone from such a lowly upbringing, could not possibly be offering such honourable teaching about the scriptures and them being fulfilled. Jesus is also implying that although they have heard this scripture many times before they have not really heard it, because they have not been living it. There are still poor, oppressed, prisoners and blind. They quickly turn from being amazed to being offended.

Jesus continues by talking about a prophet not being welcome in his own home and then talks about two old testament stories where the prophets helped gentiles in need, not Israelites. God supports all those in need, not just the insiders, the Israelites, as Jesus’ neighbours would have been thinking, but also the outsiders and those different from ourselves. They are being told that they are not special which would have felt like a real slap in the face. Jesus’ message is that the outsiders are who we need to care for and stand with. In our culture today, it is often people of colour, particularly blacks in the US and Indigenous in Canada who feel like the outsider, like the system will never work for them. This week on the TV show Blackish, there was some powerful messages about what it is like in post-election US for those who did not support Trump. The main character Dre, works with an advertising agency and the episode indicates that they basically haven’t gotten any work done since the election because they are all so depressed with the results, and each day something new comes out that is just as upsetting so they can’t work. They are lamenting how hard it has been for them since the election. They are mostly white folk around the table, one who admitted voting for Trump as a democrat because her family was suffering from lack of work and economic challenges. As they complain about how hard it is, Dre is noticed laughing at them. When asked about this he responds in this powerful reflection that I share with you here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqEpPcetqhI>

While the historical context in this clip of how the system doesn’t work for black people in the US, (and we could add for Indigenous folk in Canada) is powerful, just as important is the second part about the importance of seeking understanding of why people voted for Trump and that they are not ‘nuts’. The worst thing we can do regarding people we disagree with or who are different from us is generalize and write them off as crazy, stupid, sick, or whatever bad descriptor we may use. It is more important to humanize them, recognize they are not that different from us, and seek understanding. This week President Obama gave his farewell speech which was full of [great statements](http://www.wmagazine.com/story/hopeful-quotes-from-barack-obamas-farewell-speech-will-give-have-you-feeling-empowered). One that stood out for me related to this was:

*"If you're tired of arguing with strangers on the internet,*

*try to talk with one in real life."*

Nothing will change until we engage with and get to know those who are different from us, those who are outcast, poor, have a different opinion from us, that we make as outsiders. This is the mission of Jesus, and the mission he is calling us to as well. It is not popular or easy and Jesus knew that. Yet, he was strong in his conviction and grounded solidly in his faith and belief. So much so that when the crowd had gotten so angry with him that they were ready to throw him over the cliff, he was able to pass through them and go on his way. How did that happen? I am not sure, but I have a clue from a personal experience.

A number of years ago when our oldest son Tyler, who is now 25, was a teenager and dealing with addiction, one day I was having a particularly challenging time with him. Without going into all the details of the situation he was very upset about decisions that had been made regarding treatment for him and had been destroying things of his around the house. I had been trying to talk with him and calm him down. Finally he had grabbed a knife and he was in the dining room in front of the plate that was hanging on the wall that was made by our lawyer at the time of his adoption. He was saying he was going to destroy it. In that moment, I took a deep breath, found my ground, and firmly but calmly said, you don’t want to do that. He melted and put the knife down. In that moment, finding my ground and being a strong presence was what was needed to de-escalate the situation. Maybe that was similar to what Jesus did. Standing his ground, taking a deep breath, and looking at them intently with a ‘you don’t want to do this’ look. I imagine them letting him go and him walking through the crowd as they looked on bewildered.

It is so important these days to be grounded in our faith and strong in our convictions so that we can have the conversations needed with those who are questioning or who do not believe or who believe differently than us. It is important to keep working to bring God’s kingdom, God’s shalom, to make the world better even when it seems hopeless. Jesus mission is our mission so it is important that we stand with those who are victimized, poor, vulnerable. This is also the message Martin Luther King had during the Civil Rights Movement. As many honour him tomorrow, we remember his words:

*This I believe to be the privilege and the burden of all of us who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism and which go beyond our nation’s self-defined goals and positions. We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation and for those it calls “enemy,” for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers [and sisters].*

Blackish ended with Martin Luther Kings ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, and the son re-enacting it, interspersed with the character Dre’s reflections. So I will end with this

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZbMlidjbug>