

Luke 4:21-30

Have you ever noticed how a person who achieves great things either prospers in their hometown or fails? There's a TV show named "Hometown" where husband and wife Ben and Erin Napier, convert older rundown houses in their hometown of Laurel, Mississippi into modern homes. There is no mention of the opinion persons who also call this their hometown on the show, but if we're to believe the internet site, "The List", then the town is in love with them, not only due to the facelift they give their hometown, but also because of the tourism their show has brought to Laurel.

Then there's hometowns whose claim to fame is that they are where great athletes were raised. Like Findlay, OH where Ben Roethlisberger was raised. They renamed their football field after him, that was after he gave a sizeable donation to restore the field. If you heard his retirement speech you know that he claimed Findlay as his hometown. Again, favorable reviews.

But I have been in small towns where a person's life was totally turned around because God intervened and saved them, but the town and the congregation contained in it cannot see beyond the person they knew when... then again, there was no money or fame involved in the person's transformation.

Now in Jesus' hometown the people recognized him as Joseph's son. They'd known him all his life, they heard of what he had been doing around the area, and most likely are thinking "isn't it time for him to begin his miracles with them?" But Jesus has an uncanny way of knowing what people think before they say it, and he tells them that's not going to happen. A prophet isn't accepted in his hometown. Just like Elijah and Elisha before him he was not sent to prosper his hometown. As Jeremiah before him he would go where God sends him, and that he should not be afraid because God will deliver him.

That's what God did when Jesus was taken to the cliff by the people of his hometown. They were so angry with him when he refused to prosper them, they were going to throw him over the cliff. Yet, mysteriously God intervened, Jesus walked away from them. Just as God had promised Jeremiah that he would be delivered, God delivered Jesus from the angry mob. God had plans for Jesus; he was to go throughout the countryside spreading the good news that people have the ability to be freed from sin, and that God is love.

Back in I think the 80s, Foreigner, a pop rock band, had a hit called, "I Want to Know What Love Is" In my life there's been heartache and pain; I don't know if I can face it again; Can't stop now, I've traveled so far; To change this lonely life; I wanna know what love is; I want you to show me; I wanna feel what love is; I know you can show me; I'm gonna take a little time; A little time to look around me; I've got nowhere left to hide; It looks like love has finally found me....

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13 exactly what love is. "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

I'm sure you've heard these verses before, maybe even at your own wedding, they are a favorite for a wedding ceremony because they describe true love. Yet, these verses were never meant to be included in a wedding ceremony. The apostle Paul who wrote these verses was

never married. He was speaking of agape love.... The love God has for each of us, a pure and true love.

I'm going to reread these verses again and insert the name Jesus in place of love. "Jesus is patient; Jesus is kind; Jesus is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. He does not insist on his own way; he is not irritable or resentful; he does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Jesus bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Jesus never ends." How does that change the meaning for you?

What comes to mind when you hear, "Jesus is kind. Jesus does not insist on his own way?" Sometimes when we read the gospels it seems as though Jesus does insist on his own way, but think about it. Jesus wanted to go on living, on the night he was arrested, showing more people the way to God, yet he said, "Not my will but thine be done." And Jesus will never force himself upon a person. A person has to decide to let Jesus into their heart. That's not to say the Holy Spirit isn't working in that person to allow them to make the decision, but it's the person's decision to make.

Those men in Jesus' hometown were looking for something Jesus wasn't going to give them. Jesus said he was like Elijah who was sent to the one widow in Zarephath, not all the widows in his own hometown. Who are the widows that we need to reach out to? A widow can be described as someone who is lonely, who stretches just to make ends meet. Where do we see people like this? And how can we reach out in love to not give them a hand out, but to give them a hand up? Who do you know who would appreciate just a phone call? Who do you know that you can take a meal and sit down and share it with them? That is love.

And how much difference would it make in our world if you were to insert your name in the spaces where Paul has written 'love'? You've got the verses written there in front of you, turn to them now. Silently read them with me, inserting "I" in place of the word 'love' or 'it' .... Let's do this, now... "I am patient; I am kind; I am not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. I do not insist on my own way; I am not irritable or resentful; I do not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoice in the truth. I bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. I never end." This, if it were true, would be agape love and this is what we are to strive for.

Love never ends. There are some things in the world that are meant to come to an end. Love isn't one of them. Agape love doesn't happen because someone is bringing good to another person. Like those people in the hometowns I mentioned, they have love of those celebrities because they have brought good to their hometowns. No, love comes because God loves. We love because God first loved us. And that love doesn't end with us, it overflows, it goes out to those around us. Not that we aren't going to have bad days, not that we are going to love perfectly. We are to live life to the fullest in the way of God's will. If you don't know what God's will is for your life, begin by showing love. God is love.

All glory be to God.