

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

2nd February 2025 – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 4:21-30

BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

‘They started well’. Have you every had this thought, perhaps about a book you were reading, or a TV show or movie you were watching, and the first part was very engaging and entertaining, but after that it started to drag on so you had to force yourself to keep reading or watching, or maybe you just gave up altogether? You may have thought to yourself, ‘they used up all their good stuff at the beginning, and they had nothing left to keep going’. We see it sometimes with people who make their sporting debut with a crash and a bang, and who are touted as the next big thing, praised up by all the commentators and fans, but after a few games the opposition work them out and they come crashing back to earth. Sometimes they make it back and do realise the potential we expected, sometimes they don’t. If you follow cricket, and perhaps even if you don’t, you might think of Sam Konstas’ test debut on Boxing Day this year; having brought all kinds of Bradmanesque comparisons onto himself we eagerly awaited the exciting follow up performances which so far haven’t happened, but they still might. As people we are very fickle; we can go quickly from adoring and praising a person, team, event, TV show, etc, to being critical when the expectations we build up around them fail to be lived up to. ‘They started well’; can you think of a situation you have been able to apply those words to?

‘He started well’. Two thousand years ago, as people sat back in their houses in the little village of Nazareth, eating their fish and bread for supper and discussing the events of the day just been, I wonder how many times those words were said in relation to Jesus’ first public preaching event, for which He picked the hardest audience of all; His own hometown. This now begins the public ministry of Jesus, when He is around 30 years old. Following His baptism, then 40 days of being tempted in the desert by the devil, Jesus returns home to Nazareth. When He goes to the

synagogue there He is handed a scroll from the book of Isaiah to read. This reading is a prophecy of the Messiah coming to free the prisoners, give sight to the blind, relieve the suffering. All good, and prophecies God's people had been hearing for a few thousand years.

But when Jesus hands the scroll back, He does what He will be doing for the next three years; He shakes things up, He starts to push beyond the boundaries. This would ultimately lead to His death, but it is what He was sent to do. He is no longer saying and doing what they expected, so the people, the people He had grown up with, don't like it. When He handed the scroll back and sat down Jesus said, "What you have just heard me read has come true today." (v. 21b). At first the reaction was a bit mixed; "Isn't he Joseph's son?" (v. 22b), which could either be, 'wow, hasn't our little boy grown up so clever', or, 'who does He think He is talking to us like that!' From the very beginning Jesus started setting the tone for His ministry; pushing beyond the boundaries, bringing people out of their comfort zone, challenging expectations and hard set ways. Not a message which was ever going to go over well for everyone.

It was no longer what they expected, so the people didn't like it. We can say this both about how God's Messiah is now coming to God's people, and also about how these people who knew Jesus so well now react against Him. And being challenged in our reactions is just as much a reality for us as it was for them. Like those people, we can have our own ideas, expectations, preconceptions, preferences, that we have built up about how we interpret God's teachings, how we live out God's love, even about how things should be done in church. Many of us don't like those to be challenged, do we? We have worked things out, we're comfortable with where things sit. We also can get annoyed if we feel that in any way we are being pushed beyond our boundaries.

The boundaries which are being pushed here are that God's love and grace is for all people, and that the call we have is to be a part of sharing that. Jesus uses two examples here of God showing favour to those outside the people of Israel, a woman fed in a drought and Naaman the Syrian being healed of leprosy, as examples of how God's grace and love go beyond the boundaries

of race, nation, or culture, but are there for all who have faith in Him. The people then didn't like that, how do we respond? Do we sometimes judge others that they need to change their lifestyle to be truly Christian, or they don't come to church as much as we do, or they don't do as much in the church as we do, or we just in general look down on them. It can be a very easy, and human thing to do, can't it? God's grace is for all; it is not for us to judge, or to subtly exclude, or to look down on others in any way, or to hold others to our own expectations, or to always believe that we are right in all things. Jesus came to push the boundaries, to challenge these things in us. He came for all people. How many of those other things fit into that is between them and God, not for us to judge.

And Jesus also came to push out the boundary of our own comfort zone; what does it mean for us to take up this work of Jesus? Our first two readings for today deal with this a bit. In Jeremiah 1 we read how God sends the prophet Jeremiah to speak to the people, but Jeremiah responds with, "I'm not a good speaker, Lord, and I'm too young." (v. 6) Jeremiah wasn't comfortable with what God was calling him to do, so he challenged it. Do you ever feel like that? What are some of the excuses you put up? I'm too busy to help out in that way. Maybe next time. I don't think that's the right thing for me to do right now. That's not to say we should go and do everything so that we get to the point of burn out, but just to be open to listening if God is calling you to move out of your comfort zone a bit in your service to Him and others, and that He is giving you that call because He has equipped you to serve Him and others in that way. So, you don't have to say 'yes' to everything, but don't let your preconceptions or expectations just cut off possibilities from the beginning. Under God's call, be prepared to at least look beyond the boundaries.

The second reading from 1 Corinthians 13, the famous 'love is' passage, is just as challenging for us, as it calls us to live out our Christian faith by always showing others the same love that God shows to us through Jesus. There's a challenge! Again, it is easy to look at that and to say it's just not realistic, we'll never be able to do it, or we might just as well give up from this start. But this, like many of God's calls, is a call to us to move beyond what we think is

possible, to have faith that whatever we step out into we do with God's guidance, strength, and forgiveness. Because this love that we are called to live out, is also the love we live in. We don't earn this love of God in any way, He already shows it to us. We now just respond to it. So, again, don't just write off these and other calls God gives us to move beyond our boundaries, but pray about them, consider them, ask for forgiveness regarding them. Know that when God calls us to move beyond the boundaries He calls us to go with Him.

Jesus came to give us comfort, to show us that God's love is with us always, to make God's forgiveness for us become real. And that's a good thing. He also came to challenge us in our comfort, to call us to move beyond the boundaries so that we can both know and experience God's love fully in our lives, and be a part of taking this love out to all people. Jesus didn't just start well, but despite the reaction of His hometown He continued well, and His love and grace, and at times challenging message, still continue for us today. Take strength in His grace and comfort, but also with that strength and peace allow Him to lead us out into life and service beyond the boundaries. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- 'They started well'. Have you ever had that thought about a person, event, TV show or movie, group or organisation, etc.? What led to your disappointment; was it your expectations, your hopes, or what others had said?
- How do you feel about being pushed beyond your boundaries, particularly in relation to your faith and church life? Is this sometimes uncomfortable for you? Do you find it difficult when your expectations of a person or group aren't met? How do you react to this?
- How do you feel about being pushed beyond your boundaries in relation to how God is calling you to serve Him and others? Are you able to consider calls which are placed before you, or do you find yourself just dismissing them outright? On the other hand, do you sometimes find it hard to say 'no' to anything or anyone so you become overburdened? Pray for God's help in achieving a good balance with this.

Pray: thank God that in Jesus He has pushed beyond the boundary of our sin so we can all come into a good relationship with Him. Ask Him to help us to allow ourselves to be both comforted and challenged in accepting all people into His family and following His call to service.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
02.02.2025*