



## Sermon, Sunday February 9, 2025

### "Looking at the World with Open Eyes"

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 4:21-30** <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup>All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" <sup>23</sup>He 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.'" <sup>24</sup>And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. <sup>25</sup>But 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, <sup>26</sup>yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. <sup>27</sup>There were also many with a skin disease in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." <sup>28</sup>When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup>They 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. <sup>30</sup>But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

#### Introduction: The Nazarenes

Approximately 93 miles (150 kilometers) north of Jerusalem is Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. About 15 miles (25 kilometers) east of Nazareth is the Sea of Galilee. Jesus spent the first half of his public life near the Sea of Galilee.

Today's text describes an incident that occurred when Jesus went to Nazareth. After being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus was tempted by the devil three times for 40 days. After that, Jesus taught at various synagogues in the Galilee region in northern Israel. According to today's text, Jesus said in a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, "**The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**"(Isaiah 61:1)

The people gathered in the synagogue at that time paid attention to Jesus. They were curious about what Jesus would say and whether he was worthy of the praise that had been rumored. According to today's text, their response to Jesus was twofold. First, they were surprised by Jesus' gracious message, and second, they doubted Jesus, asking, 'Isn't this the son of Joseph?'

Jesus' response to these people's response can be summarized as follows. '**You demand that I do here in my hometown, Nazareth, what I did in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. However, prophets are not recognized in their hometown. Look at the era of Elijah (1 Kings 17), which you are familiar with. When there was famine due to drought for three years, Elijah did not go to the Israelites, but only to the widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon, a foreign region. A similar thing happened during the time of Elijah's disciple Elisha (2 Kings 5). There were many lepers in Israel, but no one was cured, and only Naaman, a foreigner from Syria (Aram), was cured. Here in Nazareth, I cannot do what God wants.'**

When the people gathered in the synagogue heard these words from Jesus, they became very angry. They thought Jesus was ignoring them. They kicked Jesus out of town and tried to push him off a cliff. Fortunately,



Jesus escaped the threats of the people and went to Capernaum in Galilee. But why did the people of Nazareth not recognize Jesus and reject him?

### **Body: What it means for Jesus to be with me**

Before answering this question, I would like you to think about how difficult it is to 'recognize' something. Every time I go to and from the three churches I serve, I carefully look at the trees, grass, and flowers around the churches. In early spring, flowers will bloom, and new shoots will emerge from bare trees and gray lawns. But now, flowers and buds are hiding. In this way, the essence of the world is hidden and difficult for us to recognize.

The Korean church where I serve, and the Simpson church have infants, children, and teenagers. As I look at those children, I think about what their future will be like. I always pray that these children grow up healthy and happy. However, I don't know the future of these children. We don't know whether these kids will become university presidents or Nobel Prize winners. Because the future of these children is hidden.

We can have experiences like the two examples above in worship. Some people experience the deep spirituality of Christianity through worship, while others participate only as spectators. It is not easy for us to recognize this hidden essence.

So, going back to the question first, **'Why did the people of Nazareth not recognize Jesus and reject him?'**

In fact, the face of Jesus taught in the Nazareth synagogue did not look like the Son of God. And the people of Nazareth did not see such an amazing sight as an angel following Jesus. (Actually, in the Gospels, even though Jesus performed amazing miracles, there were some people who did not acknowledge them.) To put it simply, the image of Jesus preaching at the synagogue in Nazareth was that of an ordinary Jew at the time. If the characteristics of the Messiah had been clearly revealed in Jesus, who taught the Word in the Nazareth synagogue, the people of Nazareth would have recognized him (or at least recognized his ability to do things they could not do). If that had been the case, there would have been no need for Jesus to rebuke the people of Nazareth, saying, **'A prophet is not welcome in his hometown,'** as in today's text. So what was the problem?

The story of Jesus being rejected from his hometown of Nazareth is consistent in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew.

What is clear is that in all the Synoptic Gospel accounts of Jesus' rejection, the people of Nazareth thought of Jesus simply as a member of their hometown.

This idea of the people of Nazareth about Jesus is like the stereotypes of people today who think that everyday life is the same every day. If we do not know or realize the difference between everyday life that appears to be the same, how can we say that the daily life given to us is different? This is the same as someone who has never loved cannot experience the power of love, and someone who has never eaten delicious food cannot know the taste of that food.

I believe that not only the people of Nazareth 2,000 years ago, but also, we are the people who met Jesus. In many ways, Jesus is with us and meets us. The way Jesus comes to us today is different from the way he did in the days of Nazareth. Two thousand years ago, Jesus met people as a real person, but now he is with us through the words of the Bible, the word of God's revelation. Jesus is with us during our worship. He is also with us in our prayers. Having Jesus Christ with us means that we experience salvation here and now.

The reason the people of Nazareth in today's text did not recognize Jesus and rejected him was because of the stereotypes they had about Jesus. They did not see Jesus as he really was but only looked at him from the perspective of someone's son.

Many people today live bound by these stereotypes and are unable to experience the kingdom of God and His salvation given to us through Jesus Christ. The lives of most modern people are dominated by the idea that only



having a lot of money can make them happy. Additionally, they are dominated by the idea that they can only be happy if they are recognized by others. But was this the kind of thought Jesus wanted?

How can we live as disciples who recognized Jesus Christ as the Son of God, rather than as people of Nazareth who did not recognize him? In everyday expression, how can we explore the depth of life and live it without being swayed by the temptations of the world?

### **Conclusion: Looking at the world with open eyes**

In my opinion, the most important answer to this question is to look at the world with ‘open eyes.’ However, it is not easy to look at the world through these eyes.

People who have achieved a lot and reached high positions are more affected by prejudice. Because seeing the world with new eyes means giving up your life achievements. However, in many cases, people have a hard time giving up on their accomplishments.

Jesus criticized the scribes and Pharisees who were in high positions at the time as hypocrites, and on the contrary, he became a friend of the tax collectors and sinners who were despised. Since tax collectors and sinners had no achievements of their own, when they were given an opportunity to change, they were able to more easily see the world with new eyes. Today, the people of Jesus’ hometown were unable to look at Jesus with new eyes and simply saw him as ‘**Joseph’s son.**’ In our religious life, we must not make the mistake of not seeing what we really need to see because of our prejudices and stereotypes. I hope that we all have the blessing of being able to see the world with open eyes. **Amen!**

