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Minneapolis, MN 55435 USA
1-800-257-7308
www.crossways.org

The Revised Common Lectionary Notes

February 3, 10, 17, and 24

by the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, founder of Crossways International

February 3, The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany: Luke 4:21-30

It is misleading to divide Luke 4:14–30 into two sections. Hence, the comments that follow deal with the larger passage. If the passages are dealt with on two successive Sundays, people need to be made aware of the implications of the larger narrative. The notion that those present in the Nazareth synagogue when Jesus preached His first sermon in His hometown were impressed with what they heard is totally misleading. They were furious—to the point of wanting to kill Him!

Luke's temptation narrative is given in 4:1–13. It reverses the second and third of the three episodes Matthew lists in his narrative, Matthew 4:1–11. Luke's opening scene takes place in the Temple (1:8–10), the third temptation takes place in the Temple (4:9–12), and the setting for Luke's final narrative is the Temple (24:53). The religious and political powers that call for Jesus' crucifixion have links to that structure and to the system carried out within its walls.

After His baptism and temptation, Jesus returns to Galilee, begins to teach in synagogues, and is initially praised by everyone (4:14, 15). But the tone changes. On one occasion, Jesus is invited to preach in the synagogue in His hometown, Nazareth (4:16–30). He begins by reading Isaiah 61:1–2 and a section of 58:6 (“to let the oppressed go free”)—passages that pointed to the coming of the Messiah and the conditions that would prevail during the Messianic Age. After reading them, Jesus states, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Indeed, in Jesus, the Messianic Age has come! Some are puzzled by what Jesus says. Some become angry and ask how it is possible that a mere “son of Joseph” can say such things and make such a claim.

Jesus' opponents understand that Jesus read selectively from Isaiah—which He was entitled to do according to rabbinic tradition. However, they are furious that He makes no reference to the following hopes expressed in Isaiah 60:1–61:6:

- God's glory will embrace His so-called Chosen People forever (60:2). Oppression by other nations will cease (61:1).
- Rulers and people of other nations will come to the Holy Land, bringing with them their wealth—across the oceans in ships and across the land on camels (60:3, 5b, 6, 11; 61:6b).

Indeed, God's people will suck into their own land and hands the wealth of the Gentiles as a child sucks milk from its mother's breasts (60:16a).

- God will pour out His vengeance on any Gentile nation that will not serve the Jewish people (60:12; 61:2a). Gentiles will rebuild any Jewish structures that they have reduced to rubble (60:10a), using the best of timbers from Lebanon in the process (60:13; see also 60:17). They will also free God's people from having to do menial tasks such as caring for animals and farming the land (61:5). Possibly the suggestion is also that God's people will be spared having to do menial tasks so that they might devote life to studying the Torah, their scriptures.
- Diaspora Jews scattered around the Mediterranean world will return to the Holy Land, bringing their silver and gold with them (60:9).
- God's people will live in their land in peace and security (60:18). The gates that lead into their towns and cities will always remain open (60:11a). The people will all be righteous, possess the land forever, and increase greatly in numbers (60:21, 22a).

When Jesus' hearers express their rage toward Him, He responds with words indicating that, although His hearers believe that they, as Jews, are God's genetically special people, in Old Testament times God used Elijah and Elisha to minister to Gentiles, to non-Jews. Elijah ministered to the widow of Zarephath; Elisha ministered to Naaman, a leper from Syria. If Jesus' audience rejects what He has to say, God will turn His attention to the Gentiles once again. At this, Jesus' hearers become enraged, drive Him out of Nazareth, and make plans to kill Him by throwing Him off a cliff.

Jesus survives, leaves Nazareth, and travels to Capernaum (4:31). (If Jesus traveled there that same day, He certainly traveled farther than the Torah permitted on a Sabbath.) While teaching in a synagogue there, Jesus casts a demon out of a man in His audience—again, on a Sabbath! Those present are amazed by what they see, and news about Jesus begins to spread far and wide (4:31-38). Next—and still on the Sabbath—Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law (4:38, 39). When the sun sets (and the Sabbath is over!), people flock to Jesus seeking to be healed and to be freed from demonic control (4:40, 41).

It is significant that when Jesus exorcizes demons, they—the enemy—recognize who He is, even though His own people do not. It is also possible that the demons tell Jesus that they know His name and who He is to indicate that He can have no power over them—and to suggest that they have power over Him. In many parts of the world still today, to know a person's name is to have power over that person. Nonetheless, Jesus demonstrates His power over the demons by silencing them.

Next morning, when Jesus goes to a deserted place, the crowds go looking for Him. When they find Him, they beg Him to remain with them. However, Jesus continues to preach in the synagogues of the region (4:42-44).

It is significant to note that many people in today's world embrace the same nationalistic and materialistic hopes and dreams, as did many Jewish people in Jesus' day. Jesus calls preachers, teachers, and parents today to make people aware of the deception embedded in these hopes and dreams, and to teach and inspire them to walk His Servant Way—"out of step" with the ways of the world.

February 10, The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany: Luke 5:1-11

In what follows, we offer some basic insights embedded in the passage listed.

5:1: Jesus is standing on a shore of the Sea of Galilee—teaching. Note that the Gospels never refer to Jesus preaching—only teaching. Gathered around Him are people who want to learn more about God’s message to them.

5:2: Jesus sees two boats resting on the shores of the lake. Those who had been using them are now washing the nets they had been using in their fishing ventures.

5:3: Jesus climbs into one of the boats—the one that Peter had been using—and asks him to take it a short distance out from the shore line. Jesus then sits down in the boat and begins teaching the crowds on the shoreline. (Note Matthew 5:1ff; after Jesus ascended a mountain, He sat down and then began His teaching venture (not preaching venture).

5:4-5: After completing His teaching, Jesus told Peter to move out further from the shoreline—and begin fishing once again. Peter points out that the disciples had been doing that prior to taking Jesus on board—but had caught nothing. However, he says that he will begin fishing once again.

5:6-7: The disciples now catch so many fish that they fear their nets will be damaged.

5:8-9: Peter is so moved by what is taking place that he suggests to Jesus that He move away from him and the other disciples (including James and John, sons of Zebedee).

5:10: Jesus exhorted them to do away with their fear—and follow Him!

5:11: The disciples now do just that!

Those who during recent years have visited Israel and seen the Sea of Galilee might recall that there are many inlets in that lake’s shoreline. Anyone who sits in a boat and seeks to address people standing on the shoreline will learn that words spoken from the boat will bounce across the sea’s surface and rise up the surface of the nearby shoreline.

Note also Jesus’ focus on “teaching.” We today need to give that issue much thought. If we merely listen to a sermon, one hour after leaving the church we remember 65% of what we heard—and only 10% by Wednesday evening. If on Sunday morning we participate in a teaching session and see teaching pictures, one hour after leaving the church we remember 90% of what we heard and were taught—and by Wednesday evening we remember 65%.

Food for thought! After all, what takes place on Sunday mornings must inspire and equip people to FOLLOW Jesus as their Servant King non-stop and full-time, in all that they think, say, and do!

February 17, The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany: Luke 6:17-26

This and the next pericope study (6:27-38) focus on some of the contents of Luke ch. 6. The contents of Matthew chs. 5-7 are referred to as “The Sermon on the Mount.” The contents of Luke 6:17-49 are

referred to as “The Sermon on the Plain.” In his “sermon,” Luke shares a number of Jesus’ sayings found in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. His “sermon” contains fewer of Jesus’ teachings than Matthew’s. Verses 24-26 are without parallel. Each Gospel distinguishes between the crowds in general and Jesus’ disciples/followers.

In Luke 6:12-16, Jesus calls His disciples, and in 6:17-49 He delivers the Sermon on the Plain. In His preaching, Jesus radically reinterprets many of the cherished notions of Judaism. For example, Jesus reinterprets the terms “blessed” and “woe” in ways that differ greatly from the way that they were interpreted in His day; see Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Although Jesus’ followers were prone (as are people today) to interpret blessedness as “Blessed are those who are rich, full now, laughing, and well-spoken of,” Jesus responds that the rich have received their consolation, the well-fed will be hungry, those who laugh will mourn and weep, and those well-spoken of are to remember that their ancestors also spoke well of the false prophets.

By way of contrast, Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets” (6:20-23). Jesus never links “being blessed” to what a person acquires and enjoys. He links it only to reflecting His own mind and manner.

Many who live in today’s more affluent nations are confused. Many people think that they are “so blessed” because they live in a big, well-furnished home, because they own and drive one or two quality cars, because they also own a “cabin” (sometimes another “mansion”) and an expensive boat on a lakeshore—and have a lot of money in their bank account. However, Jesus never links “being blessed” to what people “possess” and “enjoy.” We do well to remember that we never see a U-Haul behind a hearse! I who write these materials have visited 60 countries and conducted Bible study training events in 32 of them. What I have seen has opened my eyes (widely!) to what Jesus taught and modeled. Some “personal comments” — and please remember that I am still an Australian citizen:

During the first 24 years of my ministry, I served parishes in New Zealand and Australia. In all Lutheran parishes in these two countries, all clergy received the same salary. When any pastor received a call, he never asked what the salary would be. Salary scales were public knowledge. When eventually I served the largest Lutheran Church in these two countries (in the center of Adelaide), I was paid the same salary as was a pastor serving the smallest parish in these nations. Information concerning the salary of every pastor was public knowledge.

I have worked in a number of nations in Africa and have preached/taught in a number of cathedrals in these countries. Next to many of these cathedrals was a “bishop’s palace.” I still find it hard to understand why a bishop lived in a palace—that was surrounded by hundreds of “shacks” in which church members lived.

A colleague who has served as a financial advisor for Crossways International shared with me that standard practice in his large Presbyterian church was and is: For every dollar that his congregation spends on expanding or improving their church facility, they must give a matching dollar to mission churches in poor countries.

When the first British settlers came to Australia, many of them hunted Aboriginal people as rabbits. For example, they shot them and pushed them off cliffs! I understand that European immigrants did the same when they came to live in what is now the United States.

Jesus tells us to remember, at all times, that there are (in a sense) only two people on Planet Earth—Me and Jesus. Jesus is all around me in disguise, He is the hungry One, the thirsty One, the One who lacks clothing, the nearby Stranger, the sick One, the nearby prison Inmate. In short, we need ask, “Jesus, where are You? How can I serve you?”—and hear Him reply, “I am all around you in disguise. There are only two people on Planet Earth—you and Me!”

Please give some thought to the contents of Acts 2:43-47 and 4:32-37, The message is: “None of us owns anything. We are merely managers and sharers of God’s property.” God has provided abundantly. However, we humans have not shared compassionately! Jesus never links “being blessed” to what we acquire and enjoy. He links it only to reflecting His caring servant lifestyle!

February 24, The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany: Luke 6:27-38

Some of the insights shared in the previous section can be used in relation to the present passage in Luke’s Gospel. Rather than analyze the present Luke passage, I shall share some insights which could help people understand the implications of Jesus’ ministry and teaching in a more personal, meaningful manner.

In all four Gospels, we read of Jesus sharing meals with his disciples and other people with whom He came into contact. Some years ago, I came across the following statement by George MacDonald in relation to what many people in Jesus’ day expected their messiah to achieve:

They were all waiting for a king, to slay their foes and raise them high.
Thou cam’st as a little baby thing, that made a woman cry.

I suggest that we would do well to add the following statement:

“Thou cam’st to do Thy Servant-thing, on cruel cross to die!”

How very, very true!

We do well to give much thought to the nature of Jesus’ servant ministry, and—among other things—to the implications of becoming a member of His messianic community. In what follows, let’s give thought to the implications of eating together in Jesus’ day—and living together as members of Jesus’ community:

We are brothers and sisters of Jesus, and members of His eternal family.
We commit ourselves to serving each other as He has served us,
and defending each other with our lives.

Remember that on the night before He was put to death, Jesus shared a meal with His disciples! And He did the same after He returned to life; e.g., John 21:9-14. After the father of the prodigal son welcomed

his wayward son who had brought shame upon his father, family, and entire home village, the father organized a “village meal.” Those who shared in the meal were never again to refer to the son’s previous activities.

Still today in many parts of Africa, a “community meal” has great significance. When trouble surfaces in a village, the village elders meet (in a special N’daba hut) to deal with and resolve the problem. When they have achieved this, they arrange for a village meal to be held—which all residents are to attend. After the meal is completed, no village resident may ever again refer to the past village problem.

Still today in some African countries, if you invite someone to share a meal with you, you commit yourself to defend that person with your life!

May the insights that surface in Luke 6:27-38 and in the above insights inspire and empower you to share Jesus’ “kingdom message” with God’s people—near and far!