

2-9-25

From Scroll to Scrum

Luke 4: 14 – 30

In giving the obligatory nod to Superbowl Sunday, I've entitled my message From Scroll to Scrum. Scrum is actually a Rugby term which seems particularly appropriate since Rugby is a close cousin to our American football game. I bet there's someone here who's tried their "foot" at Rugby – or maybe there are some Lions fans here who are thinking about converting to Rugby!

Webster's Dictionary defines a scrum as "a formation of the forwards of each team crouching so that the two front rows meet shoulder to shoulder, pushing in order to gain possession of the ball."

(I was actually surprised that this was the only definition given. I thought it might have had added the words tussle or scuffle.)

I thought about the word scrum when I read Luke's chapter 4 version of Jesus being forcefully escorted out of Nazareth's synagogue after He, for all intents and purpose, proclaimed himself to be the Messiah.

In my thinking, which is speculation, I imagine a somewhat delayed reaction by the attendees who happened to be at the synagogue that Saturday morning as Jesus' words slowly began to sink in. It could have gone something like this:

1: Well, it's good to see Jesus back in town. It's sort of like a homecoming, and it sounds like he's had some success out there in the world. Mary should be quite proud of him. He's made something of himself.

Word has it he's become quite a preacher – some even say a healer. I wonder what he has in store for us today. Ssshhh... He's about to start.

“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.”

2. Oh, I just love these verses from Isaiah. They're so hopeful and powerful and promising. Can you imagine this stuff coming true? freedom and healing and justice? Boy, that'll be the day when we kick those Romans in the teeth. I can hardly wait! It'll be like the Superbowl!

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

3. But, I'm a bit confused. Did I hear him right? I thought I heard him say that **He** is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Didn't he say, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in our hearing”? That's impossible! How can **he** proclaim the Year of the Lord's favor?

This is the job of the coming Messiah! How could this guy be so pretentious, so irreverent, so reckless with God's word? Hopefully he just got confused for a moment and is suffering from a big head, what with all the attention he's been getting lately. After all, he's just a carpenter's son. Hold on, I think he's got something else to say.

“Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum... I tell you the truth: No prophet is accepted in his hometown.’”

4. Whoa, whoa, whoa. Now it's game on! So, I'm the bad guy here because I don't believe what he's saying? This guy better watch himself or he's going to make a lot more enemies than friends.

You can't go around insulting people like this and expect it to not come back on you! He's basically telling us that we're in danger of repeating the mistake of our forefathers. He says they didn't listen to God's messengers just like we're not listening to him.

"I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian."

5. Wow, that's it. I can't take any more of this garbage. It's time to eliminate this crazed and sick man. Let's give him the heave ho and make quick work of him. Watch the side door so he doesn't try to escape.

Have you ever seen a worship service turn so ugly so quickly?

The guest preacher for that particular Saturday was Jesus of Nazareth who was gaining fame and notoriety. The hometown crowd of Nazareth were chomping at the bit to see him.

They were extremely interested to hear what he had to say. They had heard the reports coming out of the neighboring town, namely miracles he had performed like driving out evil spirits, healing lepers, and something about a paralytic that could walk again. All these things happened in Capernaum, just down the road.

It was only right that Jesus would finally come home and do some similar stuff for his hometown, the village that helped raise him.

But it wasn't to be. These folks were too ensconced in their unbelief. And sadly, the Bible never records Jesus returning to Nazareth ever again.

But what really ticked off those Nazarene folk?

Was it that their hometown boy waltzed into town and supposedly did them wrong by refusing to perform any miracles?

Was it because he attributed the fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy to himself - which he did - and by saying it, was literally sending the message ... Hey, I'm better than you.

Was it because he insulted their ancestors when he told the accounts of Israel's greatest prophets Elijah and Elisha going to Israel's enemies and healing *their* people rather than the Israelites who were in such great need?

Or was it because he compared them to their ancestors saying ... You're just like them. Unbelievers. You don't believe in God's word either.

It was probably a bit of all of the above. And when you combine it all together, it was more than they could handle. So, they decided to take care of this rascal themselves. After all, who's better to mete out punishment than those who helped raise him?

Unless something drastic was done, he was going to destroy Nazareth's reputation, whatever reputation they had left:

So, "They got up, drove him out of town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff."

Hadn't the devil already tempted Jesus to throw himself off the temple in order to create a spectacle? These people were more than happy to assist!

What a sight this whole scenario must have been.

But what are we, a bunch of 21st century Christians, to gain from Luke's incredible account?

I think for starters, we have to admit that if you and I had been Jewish Nazarenes and were at that Synagogue on that given Saturday, we probably would have joined the scrum that pushed Jesus to the top of the hill.

Oh, we may have not been in the front row locking arms with our neighbor in order to corral Jesus from initially escaping. (I doubt Jesus put up any resistance.) But we'd probably be somewhere near the back row shaking our heads and wondering what went wrong with this boy's upbringing? Where had he gone off the rails?

And where does a guy get off saying things like that?

In other words, peer pressure would have probably gotten the best of us and defending our Great Great Great Aunt Sally would have trumped any sense of guilt we might have felt.

Isn't this reaction pretty much true almost anytime we are confronted with our own sin?

We put up our defenses and push back. Rugby anyone?

Well, I wouldn't have done it if you would not have done what you did! You made me do it! You made me sin!

I'm great at this one, especially with my kids:

I'm angry and yelling at you because you did not do what I told you to do. You knew you should have done that, but you didn't so now I have to yell at you.

We're all good at justifying our sins:

I only looked for a little bit.

It's this darn computer. Things pop up without me having any control.

Everybody else does it.

Don't I deserve to have a little fun?

He deserved it. I was just giving him what he deserved.

And the list goes on.

Our hackles go up, our defenses kick in.

Denial will also be one of our first responses, and we find ourselves marching Jesus to the top of the hill to throw him off.

And this is an insane response when you think about it, because Luke tells us that Jesus came to bring us Good News! He came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor – to set prisoners free, to help the blind see, and the lame walk.

And our response is to cast him down the hill and hurt him?

It's because underneath all these responses there is something else brewing, and it's called shame.

This is what we feel when we're caught in sin. And it's a terrible feeling that no one likes to feel because shame is essentially reminding us that we are broken and weak and sinful and in desperate need of a Savior. So, in another sense shame is a good thing if it leads us to repentance and to seek out God who forgives and makes all things new.

So, point #1 is that we've all been tempted to and have rejected Jesus like those church goers did on that one Saturday long ago. We all have to own this, and it's okay because God knows our sins. This is the whole reason he came to us in the first place: to heal the blind, to restore our walk, to set us free from the consequences of our own sin. But we remain in the dark if we don't realize this and embrace this truth.

Point # 2 is that we are still currently living in the year of the Lord's favor! The offer of God's salvation for mankind is still on the table! As long as the Lord tarries – as long as Jesus delays his return, we, the church, are to be about pointing people to Jesus – not fighting in the pews or pushing people out the side doors or getting just plain angry when our brother speaks the truth, a truth that we probably don't want to hear. Our mission is clear: Be a window to God's grace, not an obstacle!

Oh, by the way, I don't think Jesus was judging the people of Nazareth because of this one unfortunate incident. Their unbelief is probably a deep-seated attitude that manifested itself in a number of ways in their everyday lives. It just happened to rear its ugly head

when they were personally confronted with the One who is the Truth. Their unbelief was called out, and that made them very uncomfortable.

How about you? What stirs in you when you come into the House of God? Do come here with joy and expectation that your spirit and will be strengthened and your soul fed by God's spirit?

Or do you come here with unbelief in your heart, carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, having no belief that God loves you or desires to carry your burden and to minister to your soul through the power of the Holy Spirit and to give you peace and contentment and purpose?

I know that the burdens and pains and trials of life can really get us down. So much so that sometimes we're not sure we can make it through another hour let alone another day.

What will keep us going in the positive direction?

Perhaps part of it maybe the thought that though Jesus was rejected by the very people who helped raise him – those that he had grown up with and went to synagogue with and worked side by side with – those he relied on as a youngster to show him the right way to live – even though they rejected him and wanted to do harm to him,

He didn't have to fight back. He didn't have to defend himself. He didn't have to call anybody names or argue his theological position.

He just walked through the crowd and went on his way. He could do this because he knew his Father was watching out for Him. His Father had his back, and His Father had bigger fish for him to fry.

And that right there, my friends, is a miracle of first -class proportions.

I don't know if the Biblical scholars would classify Jesus' walking through a hostile crowd a miracle, but I sure do.

As much as I love this world, and all the wonderful gifts God has blessed me with in this world. I am not naïve. The world and its system are hostile to my faith.

Yes, I can look at God's creation and see his marvelous and mighty hand that has made it all, and this causes me to pause a moment and revere God, but to know that God loves me and forgives and died for me even though I would have cheered them on to throw him off the hill.

I, for one, am glad he walked through the crowd and went on his way, untackled and undaunted toward the goal, carrying with Him in his heart the salvation of our souls and the fulfilling of his Father's will.

"Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil 2: 5 -11