

**Luke's Gospel: The Beginning of Jesus' Rejection—Luke 4: 14-30**  
**Pastor Denise Douglas**

Have you ever said something in a meeting, in a class, or around the holiday dinner table that just landed like a lead balloon? Anybody? Am I the only one?! In today's scripture passage Jesus goes from beloved hometown son to infuriating radical in 16 verses or less. Jesus knows about words landing like a lead balloon.

The Gospel of Luke, as Pastors John and Mike have mentioned, is known as the Gospel of the Great Reversal. Lost things found, wrongs made right, illness to health, condemnation to redemption, death to life. While we rejoice at the reversals Luke brings to light, reversals happening in the moment often cause angst and anger. In Luke Chapter Four, Jesus is just back from the wilderness. Verse 14 tells us He has come back filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at **Luke 4:14-30 NLT**:

*Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures.*

*The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."*

*He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"*

*Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. "How can this be?" they asked. "Isn't this Joseph's son?"*

*Then he said, "You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself'—meaning, 'Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.' But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown. Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian."*

*When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.*

This is at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Some might say it looked doomed from the start. When John came to be a Pastoral candidate at New Hope, if at the end of his first sermon the church ran him out of the building, I doubt the elders would have hired him. John doesn't hesitate to say the hard things to us now, 7 years in, but he's got the cred to do it. Jesus is brand new to a teaching role; He has been a carpenter in His hometown. The people are thinking, *wow -didn't we watch his mom change his diapers? Didn't we see Joseph shaking his head as he taught him to use a hammer? Isn't this the same kid who ran in and out of our houses with our sons and daughters?*

Luke indicates they were amazed at the beauty of His teaching, the graciousness of His words. This moment in the synagogue was a Spirit-filled moment. Something significant was happening and they knew it. They looked at Him intently. But in a hot minute, they would be ready to throw Him off a cliff. Why is that? In Luke's version, it's not that Jesus claims the Messianic Words of Isaiah are about Him. Notice the sequence - He claims that piece of His identity and they are in wonderment.

It's what Jesus says next that begins a stir that turns into a threatening mob. God's prophets, Jesus says, have never been able to do the work of God among their own people. And neither will He be able to. Those expecting the Messiah to be all about Israel's restoration to power and position find this more than disconcerting. *How dare this whipper snapper condemn our ancestors and lift up the foreigner?*

Mike talked last week about expectations in the midst of reversal; how even John the Baptist had his doubts. Reversals shake things up. They go against status quo. They can usher in confusion while it's happening, but if God is in it, it will settle into all the right places, creating a better path forward. But it will be costly for some.

Jesus' ministry pushed outside the walls, outside the boundaries of God's chosen people again and again. Did He love Jerusalem? Absolutely. And His ministry would establish, and bring clarity, that God's Kingdom extends to every human, every nation. **God chooses everyone.** Shalom is for everyone. The prodigal son, the lost sheep, the Samaritan Woman, the Roman Centurion - all have access to God.

Mary, Jesus' mum, was a young woman from the less than desirable region of Galilee. There were then, as there are today, "hierarchies of place." The right side of the tracks, the wrong side, and places in-between. Galilee was one of the places in-between. There were other check-points to consider when deciding if a person was superior or inferior. We do this without even thinking—which is why it is important to stop and do some thinking—where people lived was a checkpoint, language was a checkpoint, how often you went to temple, whether or not you lived in Jerusalem or in a place of mixed ethnicity. Galilee, where Jesus did much of His ministry, where He drew most of His disciples was

considered inferior to Jerusalem and Judea. Their dialect was interwoven with Greek influences and it was a mixed population. Remember Nathaniel's question to Philip when Philip said, "*We have found the Messiah! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth*", and Nathaniel says, "*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*"

We use a term today called **othering**. It means to negate a person's humanity, their worth, because they do not fit into the norms of our checklist, of a certain social group. Those *other-ed* are seen as less worthy of dignity and respect. Nathaniel was *othering* those from Nazareth. He hadn't even met Jesus, but the fact that he was from Nazareth colored his perception. *But this man from Nazareth....* would challenge and reverse Nathaniel's long-held beliefs about God, about the Messiah, and about people.

Anytime people are seen as the social *in group*—more deserving, more chosen, and others less than deserving, less than chosen—we find abuses big and small. We use broad cultural terms such as *tribalism* and *segregation*. But we *other* people in a thousand small ways every day—we size people up, blind to the fact we are doing it, as worthy or unworthy due to age, health, gender, vaccinated, not vaccinated, conservative or liberal, 'Trumper' or 'non-Trumper', *Let's Go Brandon/Let's go Biden*, the color of someone's skin or language - all checkpoints of hierarchy. Jesus invites us to something different.

In the Great Reversal that is the gospel, Jesus erased the hierarchy of human worth. He swung pendulums. He lifted up those who were seen as poor, and lowered those who were rich; lifted up those seen as unacceptable due to their location, their language, their different approach to faith, and brought low those who consider themselves high up in wealth, position, and perceived righteousness.

Mary prophesied in Luke 1—in the Magnificat:

*His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. (Luke 1:51-53)*

This is the gospel reversing the damage, the injustices of humanity. It is not pushing one human ideology above another; it is pushing the Kingdom of God into real life. We will see this through the book of Luke, through Acts, on into the closing book of the Revelation where the Kingdom of God is revealed as a community of all nations and tribes, all races and languages. God's freedom and shalom accessible equally to all.

One of our Beloved Community members said of this Luke 4 passage, "*Notice that Jesus was not thrown off the cliff, but walked back through the crowd and continued his mission. His message of forgiveness, mercy, grace and love would not be denied that day. Envision LOVE that walked through hate with all its venom and fury and othering*"...and would stay on course to fulfill God's purpose for humanity.

Many in the first century saw Rome as the enemy and spent a lot of time and energy hating anyone associated with them. Jesus, not the Messiah they were expecting, but the Messiah who is, revealed that Rome was not the enemy, nor was the Gentile, nor the

Samaritan. Sin was the enemy of every heart, every relationship and every nation. Sin divides, creates hierarchies of worth, *others* people to places of abuse and oppression.

Weeks ago, Pastor John talked about how we are icons of the kingdom of God—symbols, representatives, a worthy veneration of Jesus. Think with me for a moment about the anger in this passage—the mob mentality, the sudden venom, the choosing their own fury over the hope and promise Jesus brought! Where are you in this crowd? Where am I? Does our fury over politics, race, and other complex issues, place us, you and me, in the mob that day, or standing as an icon—a symbol of the kingdom of God, a worthy veneration of Jesus?

So many today are quick to fury—even in the church. When we move into that space, our ability to listen to God or others is lost. Physiologically the two cannot happen at the same time. Chemically, fury shuts down our ability to listen and learn. Fury puts us in danger of pushing someone, even someone like Jesus, off the proverbial cliff. Or canceling them.

What Jesus shared that day in the Synagogue, and throughout His ministry, sounded like a completely new and WRONG story—it was offensive to many while life-giving to others. In reality, it was the old, old story Jesus was telling. The story of a world God has always intended. **A story God calls his people to tell.** Sometimes Israel did that well, sometimes they didn't. Sometimes the church has done that well, sometimes we haven't.

**At NH we are committed to hearing the Jesus story even when it is not what “our camps, our tribes” are espousing. At New Hope we are committed to hearing a new story for today based on the old story.**

Church, we make mistakes. We get swept along with the loudness of our times. Could we commit to hear well? It will take intention and a willingness to stay the course. I am grateful for John's leadership in inviting us through this series to places of stillness before God. James instructs believers to: *“Be quick to listen and slow to speak”*

**At NH, we are committed to acknowledging our mistakes – committed to confession, lament, forgiveness and grace. We are committed to being a safe place for all of us to do this. We are committed, as it says on our Justice page, to partnering with God to make wrongs right.**

**To be part of the Great Reversal.**

A year ago, our Justice ministry was tasked with pulling together a team that would listen well and lean into the topic of racial tensions and racial healing. There are 8 of us. We went into this knowing that to do this particular work takes a willingness to be uncomfortable. To be willing to say awkward things, to feel anxious, to get offended, and to stay. at. the. table. of the beloved.

The 8 of us hold varying opinions; varying approaches. It is our desire, having been asked to do this work, to lay down our fury, and to learn and model what it can look like to disagree, to find common ground in Christ, to accept each other as icons of the kingdom, brothers and sisters in Christ, and be in Beloved Community. I hold in deep respect the brave souls who have said, *“Yes, I will serve on this team.”*

We want to invite you into the journey. One of our next steps is to invite anyone interested in having difficult conversations well—meaning learning to disagree and still look like Christ—we want to invite you into a small group experience. We are using a proven curriculum designed especially for times like these called *The Colossian Way*. This is a ten-week small group experience, led by Pastor Mike Stern, myself, and Andrea Cook.

**Erika Preuitt and Andrea Cook**, Chair and Vice-Chair of The Beloved Community, both amazing leaders and followers of Christ in our community - are going to come up and help us explore the topic of *othering*.

**(Experiential Sunday Transcript - next page)**

## Beloved Community Experiential Sunday Transcript

### Beloved Community Introduction & Explanation by Emily Greco & Bethzaida Yarbrough

**Emily:** I want to introduce you to my friend Bethzaida. She and I are a part of a group called the Beloved Community. We want to take a few minutes to introduce you to The Beloved Community and what we are working on here at New Hope.

**Bethzaida:** The Beloved Community was formed to lead New Hope in work related to racial reconciliation. We want to take steps toward just and equitable engagement both inside and outside the walls of the church.

The Beloved Community wants to partner with God in making things right by:

1. Helping build God's Kingdom on earth
2. Loving God and Loving All Others
3. Living by Grace - By both Receiving and Sharing Grace

**Emily:** This team is led by Denise Douglas, Mike Stern, Erika Preuitt, Andrea Cook, Portia Manjengwa and Omar Cifuentes, Bethzaida, and myself

*Let's begin our time of worship with a reading of [slide] Revelation 7:9-12, read in Spanish*  
**By Pastor Omar Cifuentes:**

*"I looked again. I saw a huge crowd, too huge to count. Everyone was there— all nations and tribes, all races and languages. And they were standing, dressed in white robes and waving palm branches, standing before the Throne and the Lamb and heartily singing:*

*Salvation to our God on his Throne!  
Salvation to the Lamb!*

*All who were standing around the Throne—Angels, Elders, Animals—fell on their faces before the Throne and worshiped God, singing:*

*Oh, Yes!  
The blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving,  
The honor and power and strength,  
To our God forever and ever and ever!  
Oh, Yes!"*

### Introduction to *Othering*- Andrea Cook & Erika Preuitt

#### Setting the Context - Erika

Thank you, Denise, for such a powerful and poignant message. The world is so polarized today. So many of us are trying to make sense of what is going on in a world devastated by COVID-19 and divided along political lines. Our local community is also struggling, with

tragic rises in community violence and so many experiencing homelessness. I am sure we all have opinions about the state of things on multiple levels. These opinions sometimes put us at odds with others, leading us to draw lines in the sand, making assumptions about people who may have another experience, disagree with us, or differ from us. I can attest to this personally—sometimes we can be very critical of the world around us and the people within it. Sadly, we see this *othering* within the church, sometimes to the point where people outside of the church fear us because we are Christians. This has historical and present context

### Defining Othering- Andrea

Erika has referenced what is known as *othering* - as she indicated, we want to provide you with some context so that together we can do the important work of becoming the Beloved Community that God intends.

- Othering involves focusing on a difference and using that difference to destroy our sense of similarity or connectedness between people.
- Othering sets the stage for discrimination and persecution by reducing empathy and preventing our ability to know and love one another.
- I ask that you consider how you have been impacted by “othering,” and how you might have “othered” people you have encountered.
- Othering can be as subtle as...
  - Ignoring people’s ideas, work, or opinions.
  - Not giving people the benefit of the doubt.
  - Failing to share important information.
  - Avoidance.
  - Withholding resources.
  - Excluding people from meetings, social events, or recognition that is due them.
- Othering is based on a wide range of attributes...
  - Age
  - Disability
  - Ethnicity, nationality, and race
  - Gender identity, sex
  - Language
  - Occupation
  - Political affiliation
  - Religion

People are different. As the Beloved Community Team began our work, we talked about how God has created us with diversity *AND* designed us for Community. We are called to see and love the image of God in each person.

We can use our differences as an opportunity to share and learn or we can use our differences as an excuse to build walls between us. When we highlight differences between groups of people to increase suspicion of them, to insult them, or to exclude them, we are going down the path known as *othering*.

### Tuskegee Airmen example:

On the evening of January 20, 2022, I was watching the CBS Evening News and this story was shared. I thought it was a very poignant example of othering:



In 1949, a team from the famed all-Black Tuskegee Airmen won the first Top Gun contest, a gunnery competition among pilots from across the Air Force. But the record book listed the winner as "unknown."

"They knew who won, but they just didn't want to recognize us," said Retired Lieutenant Colonel James Harvey, a 98-year-old former



fighter pilot who was part of that winning team.



Harvey said the trophy "mysteriously got lost" — until 2005 when a historian found it in storage at an Air Force Museum.

"She says, 'Why isn't this on display?' The guy said, 'We can't display everything, but this item will never be on display,'" Harvey said.

The trophy is now on display, and last week a plaque commemorating the first Top Guns was unveiled at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, where the original competition was held.

"We proved that we were the best," he said. "Well, OK, let's show it."

### Love and Fear - Erika and Andrea

1 John 4:18 - *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

Fear ultimately leads to othering, but love leads us into community

As followers of Jesus Christ we have nothing to fear

We are loved by the God of the Universe, as is every person.

*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also*



*ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:10-12)]*

### Closing-Andrea and Erika

#### **Andrea:**

As followers of Jesus, we can call on the power and work of the Holy Spirit to reveal and raise our consciousness to the ways in which we participate in the hurtful/sinful behavior of othering, both inside and outside the church.

We are called to love, reconcile, and stand in the gap of a polarized and weary world.

As icons of the kingdom of God, we must come into the community despite our differences

#### **Erika:**

As a Beloved Community, we can do this challenging and important work through vulnerability, humility, and coming together to lament the hate and bigotry in our world that is in so many ways reflected in and through the church

The way forward will require us to be open to learn, grow and reconcile the harms that have been done in our communities, particularly along racial lines.

We are all the Beloved Community and we are excited to travel the journey from fear to love as New Hope, to cultivate an environment where we are accepting, compassionate and aware.

**Erika:** Denise shared with us how Jesus was *othered* by his hometown. A crowd of people who were responding to Jesus' message, let's take a moment to reflect on the sermon and what we have talked about:

Who are you in the crowd?

What does *othered* look like, sound like, feel like for you?

What do you lament on the subject of *othering*?

### Creative Element instructions-Andrea:

When you arrived you chose a heart and a pen. We encourage you to take time during worship to write down what is resonating with you; write down or draw your thoughts, feelings, emotions to this conversation. Online community, you can send your reflections to [justice@newhopepdx.org](mailto:justice@newhopepdx.org) and we will create a heart for you.

These hearts will be put together as an art piece for the upcoming gallery called the **Illumination Gallery**. Our heart reflections are a representation of us as a community listening to God and allowing God to illuminate within us ways for us to love one another as we are intended to.

## Communion:

If we knew we were dying tomorrow, we would gather our people and say what we most wanted them to know. Jesus, this Creator God, Son of Man, on the night before His death, went low and washed the dirty feet of His closest followers, who were too busy arguing over who was the greatest, the worthiest, to have done this job for each other. Jesus said, *Do as I have done - love and serve each other in this way.*

Before Jesus passed the cup and the bread, he said, *this is my body broken for you and my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sin.* This morning, as the worship team continues to lead us, could we use this time to lament our own fury and division, our own resistance to the lowliness and example of Jesus. Take the elements when you are ready.

Beloved Community. It is a beautiful term and it is who we are. Go in the grace and peace of Jesus.