

Sermon Note: Beyond Our Comfort Zone

Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany

Introduction

As we continue our Epiphany series on *Foundations & Futures*, we return to Jesus in the synagogue, picking up right where we left off last week. After reading from Isaiah, Jesus boldly declares that God's promises are fulfilled—but then takes it a step further. At first, the crowd marvels at his words, but as Jesus expands God's vision beyond Israel, their excitement turns to outrage. The people of Nazareth, once proud to claim Jesus as one of their own, suddenly reject him. This week, we explore what it means to follow a God who calls us beyond our comfort zones—into new relationships, new opportunities, and a love that stretches wider than we might expect.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OT1cDRiIE4U>

Note: This clip is from an individual YouTube user and not from an official or named organization.

In this compilation from *Remember the Titans* (2000), a newly integrated football team struggles with division but learns to overcome their differences and unite as one.

Why This Video?

This clip highlights the discomfort and resistance that often come with change. At first, the players struggle with leadership disputes, conflicts, and personal biases. But through shared challenges—including a powerful lesson at Gettysburg—they begin to see beyond their differences and embrace unity. This transformation mirrors the challenge of stepping beyond our comfort zones and trusting God to lead us into new relationships and opportunities.

Video Discussion Questions

1. What scenes in this compilation show the players struggling to accept their new teammates? Why do you think they react this way?
2. Coach Boone (*Denzel Washington*) pushes the team beyond their divisions. What strategies does he use to challenge their assumptions and encourage unity?
3. How does the Gettysburg scene reshape the way the team sees themselves and each other? What lessons does it teach about overcoming division?
4. The team's transformation happens over time through shared experiences, conflict, and leadership. What are some real-life examples of how you have seen people move past differences and find unity?
5. Have you ever had an experience where stepping outside your comfort zone led to personal growth? What made the experience difficult, and what did you learn from it?

Luke 4:21-30 (NRSVue)

²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” ²³He 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.’” ²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵But 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, ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There 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.” ²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They 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. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Study Questions

1. What does Jesus declare to the people in the synagogue after reading from Isaiah? What is its significance?
2. How do the people initially respond to Jesus’ message, and what questions do they ask?
3. Which two Old Testament stories does Jesus reference? Why do these references anger the people in the synagogue?
4. How do the people of Nazareth respond to Jesus after he challenges their beliefs?
5. Jesus’ words and actions in Nazareth were both affirming and challenging. In what ways does his message challenge us today? How can we ensure we are open to God’s work, even when it doesn’t align with our expectations or comfort zones?
6. What is one way you can step outside your comfort zone this week to share God’s love with someone who might feel like an “outsider?” What action will you commit to that reflects Jesus’ inclusive and challenging message?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. If you were in the crowd that day, how do you think you would have felt about what Jesus said? How would you know if what he said was true?
2. Has a stereotype or a label ever been put on you? Did you have a hard time escaping it? If you are comfortable to share your experience, please do so.
3. The crowd listening to Jesus would have known him from boyhood. The Bible has very few stories about Jesus as a child or even a teenager. When you think about that, does it make more sense as to why the hometown crowd may have a hard time believing some of the things that were being said about Jesus (like him being the Son of God)?
4. Have you ever faced doubt or been turned down when you tried something new or shared something difficult to say? What did that teach you?
5. Is it difficult for people to accept criticism of their community or beliefs, whether individually or as a group? Why or why not?
6. Do you know of someone or a story about someone famous who was pushed out of their community because of who they were or what they believed? Who and why?

Weekly Action

Discussion Question #6 invites us to step outside our comfort zones to share God's love. As a way to put this into practice, consider identifying someone outside your usual circles and extending an invitation for conversation. This could be a coworker, neighbor, fellow churchgoer, someone from another faith community, or even someone who voted differently in the last election. Your goal is to listen, learn, and connect in a way that reflects Jesus' inclusive and challenging message.

Prayer

God of all, as you sent Jesus to speak truth and offer redemption, so you send us to live boldly as Your disciples. When we face resistance, grant us courage; when we encounter need, grant us compassion. Send us into the world as faithful reflections of your love. Amen.