

**The Mouse Who Roared**  
**Luke 4:14-21**  
**Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, January 24, 2010**

A pastor asked his middle school students to go around the room and give a word or phrase that best answered the question, "Who is Jesus for you?" At first there were the expected stock answers like "Lord and Savior," "Messiah" and "Good Shepherd," but after going around the room a second time the answers started becoming more imaginative. One said, "Jesus is like a protective bubble who surrounds you,," Another said, "Jesus is like a tour guide who shows you through life." A third said, "Jesus is like a mouse." "A mouse? You mean a mouse on a computer or a small fuzzy mouse who likes cheese?" "I mean a small fuzzy mouse. Do you remember the story of the mouse who took the thorn out of the lion's paw? Well Jesus is like that little mouse who took a big risk helping the lion when he was in trouble. The lion could have eaten him up, but the little mouse did the right thing anyway."

I never thought of Jesus as a mouse, but still, this analogy intrigues me. In the old fable the mouse comes to the aid of the lion as only a mouse could. The image of this small, defenseless creature being a risk taker for the right reason really hits the mark and helps us begin to appreciate the tremendous power at work in Jesus' life.

We've just come through the Christmas Season remembering how God made the decision to risk everything to make love possible. Jesus' entire life from beginning to end is a seamless story of intentional risk taking for all the right reasons. That's why Jesus remains our role model for authentic living and when Jesus says, "follow me," there's no doubt you're leaving the safe and comfortable life behind. At the same time the longer you follow Jesus the more you're persuaded to discover, if you really want to be that authentic personality you hope to become, you'll have to risk yourself and allow Jesus take the thorns out of your paw.

The only disagreement I have with that Sunday School student's "mouse" analogy is it has a happy ending. The same wasn't true of Jesus' end. He died while pulling the thorns out from our sinful hearts. And yet his death at our hands was all along within God's plan for our salvation. On Good Friday we gave our worst to Jesus, but he turned it around and gave us his best. His death at our hands was God's way to make love possible.

Luke reports Jesus returned to Nazareth, his home town, fresh from his forty days in the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil. After enduring such a long and draining ordeal, perhaps he wanted to recuperate back home with his family and friends. So he went home.

There on the Sabbath he went to his synagogue and there was asked by his rabbi to read and interpret the scriptures. This wasn't unusual. Laymen were routinely asked to teach and preach.

Jesus read from the scroll given to him which was the Book of Isaiah but he chose the passage he wanted to read.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He sent me to proclaim  
release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind  
to let the oppressed go free  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's  
favor."*

After his temptation in the wilderness Jesus committed himself to the life and ministry of self-denial and truth-telling. He wouldn't conform to the popular will and be a Warrior King who'd triumph over Israel's enemies and restore Jerusalem to her former glory. Instead he'd be the Servant Messiah who'd speak the truth in love and invite people to repentance and new life.

So, on that day in Nazareth he began his ministry and announced his mission to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight, free the oppressed and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

This mission statement can be reduced to the simple vision statement, "I come to bring good news, freedom and justice."

No one could possibly have a problem with anybody standing for good news, freedom and justice. It would be like being against the flag, mom and apple pie. In general terms it sounds good, but when you get into the specifics, that's when people get riled up.

That's exactly what happened that Sabbath morning in Nazareth. At first his hometown congregation "was amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth" but suddenly Jesus started focusing on specifics, causing the congregation to become uncomfortable, then furious because he was holding them as accountable as non believers who reject the Good News and work against freedom and justice.

He reminded his neighbors that historically prophets are never accepted by their home town. He then recounted how Elijah the Prophet singled out a Gentile woman when a severe famine hit Israel and the Prophet Elisha singled out a Gentile man to heal when there were many lepers in Israel. Jesus' point?

God loves the Gentiles, as much as he loves the Jews. Just because God made his covenant with Israel and called the Jews to be God's Chosen People didn't mean freedom, justice and the Good News is only for the Jews. It's for everybody Jew and Gentile, slave and free.

That inclusive interpretation of God's grace is what enraged Jesus' neighbors. They couldn't believe God would or could embrace their pagan neighbors as much as them.

So what lesson can we draw from this story? The obvious lesson is God loves all people equally no matter their skin color, class, or ethnicity. We even teach this to our children. "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

Certainly you and I embrace this sentiment and recognize it for being non-negotiable. If God loves people across the class lines and racial spectrum, we have no choice but to go and do likewise.

But some churches even today balk at this when they're called upon to open their doors and hearts to "outsiders" not quite like themselves. Sure, they'd nod their heads in approval when hearing Isaiah's vision to bring "good news to the poor" and "release to the captives" but start becoming uncomfortable and angry when any effort is made to welcome these "outsiders" into their own church. Not because they're hateful but because they're afraid, afraid these "new comers" will change the traditions, complexion and culture of their church home, that's always been their safe haven, into something they'd no longer recognize.

I'm grateful you realize Babcock Church isn't our private Club House where membership has its privileges. We want our doors to be open to everyone. We have no litmus test for membership, except this: We confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and pledge our lives to Jesus and the life and ministry of our faith community and the people God sends us we are called to love and serve.

But God doesn't just send people our way Christ also sends us out looking for people we can love and serve. That's part of our commitment as disciples, we go out looking for people who need to hear the Gospel, be freed from their darkness and despair and experience the justice due to each and every child of God.

Proclaiming the Gospel, being a proponent of freedom and working for justice, that's what Christ calls his Church to do, intentionally and regularly. If we ignore that calling we do so at our own peril. But if we come together and listen, then do the best we can with what we got to preach the good news, work for

justice so our neighbors can experience the freedom to know God, we're doing our job and God will smile.

One of our goals as Christians is to become Christ-like. If we accept that middle school student's analogy I guess that means we're supposed to be "mouse-like" that is, being like the mouse who took the tremendous risk to pull out the thorn from the lion's paw.

Within the hour we'll break bread together and then call ourselves to order for our Annual Congregational Meeting. We'll be talking about budgets and staff salaries, elect new officers and nominating committee members, we'll even talk and pray about where God is leading us.

But even though it may seem to be a meeting to discuss the business of the church let's remember it's really a meeting to facilitate the ministry and mission of our church and recommit ourselves as disciples of Christ called for a noble purpose: to take risks, remove thorns and bring healing to our neighbors.

May we be empowered by God to say with Jesus:

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because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He sent me to proclaim  
release to the captives  
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