

JESUS: ETHNIC HEALER

Open

The histories of our peoples—including immigration stories, ethnic or racial heritage, power and privilege, enslavement, forced removal, intra-ethnic conflict, and more—shape how we view ourselves and each other, positively or negatively.

- How might your cultural and ethnic background shape how you view yourself and others?

Context

The people of Nazareth, a small Jewish village, carried deep scars in their ethnic stories. After Assyria's invasion around 732 B.C., the surrounding region became known as the "Galilee of the Gentiles [non-Jews]." Resentful of the centuries-long foreign domination, many Jewish Galileans were fierce nationalists. Revolt seethed continuously, mostly underground.

Read Luke 4:14-30 (NIV)

^{4:14} Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

²³ Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Discuss

1. What stands out about Jesus' mission (vv. 17-19)? Who is he prioritizing?
2. Jesus' mission statement omits portions that the townspeople used to support their nationalist agenda (vv. 4:17-19; cf. Isa. 61:1-7). For example, Jesus does not mention God's vengeance (Isa. 61:2), which they applied to their enemies. What are some of the ways the villagers respond, and why? As one of the villagers, how might you have responded?
3. Why does Jesus' hometown crowd become outraged when Jesus mentions two examples of God favoring other people? What might Jesus be trying to expose?
4. God sends messengers to heal and bless Israel's ethnic enemies. What does that tell us about God's priorities?

Reflect



- How might God's grace for all people, including those we disagree with or fight against, challenge our interests and agendas?
- How might Jesus want to confront any racist history or ethnocentrism in our hometowns, neighborhoods, or even families?

Pray

Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you and respond by offering gratitude, anguish, confession, or praise. Pray for courage to follow Jesus' mission in your calling, for strength when facing resistance, and for compassion to serve the poor, the sick, and the unseen with justice and grace.

Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Respond by offering gratitude, anguish, confession, or praise.

Like those in first-century Nazareth, we and the communities we belong to too often define ourselves by our scars—the things that have been done, said, and not done to and by us.

- Where might you place yourself in this story?
— Are you in your hometown within the crowd? What are your thoughts as you listen to Jesus?

— Do you see yourself as the “prophet”? How might Jesus being on the receiving end of anger and violence influence your view of him and the world? What are the risks of recognizing and confronting bias in others or a system? Have you ever experienced resistance when trying to serve the underserved, advocate for equity, or challenge injustice?

Have you ever faced anger or violence for speaking the truth?

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