

Study 5: Jesus Brings Liberation for All

Hundreds of years have passed, and the Israelites continue to struggle with faithfulness to God. They endure seasons of war and peace. Under Babylonian rule, many Israelites were sent into exile, torn away from their cultural-religious home in Jerusalem. Their temple, the dwelling place of God, was destroyed. The Israelites returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple under Persian rule, yet God's presence was not there like before. The prophets foretold that God would send someone who would save them. This Messiah, a suffering servant, would take all evil and sin on himself (Isaiah 53), establish justice (Isaiah 42:1-4), and have an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7). God would make a new covenant that would not be broken (Jeremiah 31:31-33); God's Spirit would be poured out on all people (Joel 2:28-29); and God would once again dwell with them. So the Israelites wait and wait, longing for God to send the king who would establish his rule once and for all, overthrowing every other empire. The racial strife and pain in our country was not created in a vacuum. What we see today, what we may even experience ourselves, is built upon a context and history¹.

The histories of our people(s)—be it immigration stories, holding multiple ethnic or racial heritages, power and privilege, histories of enslavement, being forcibly removed from our land, intra-ethnic conflict, and more—can shape how we view ourselves and each other, whether positively or negatively. Our bodies carry biases- both internalized bias and external bias-shaped by our contexts. Similarly, Jewish history shaped how Jews viewed themselves and others (non-Jews were referred to as Gentiles). In today's text, Jesus confronts the ethnic bias of the Jews through a radical implication about who is welcomed in God's kingdom.

¹ Resources for further learning: ["Race in America" - Holy Post Podcast](#) - 17 min video overview of the history of race; [Harvard Implicit Bias Test](#); [The Color of Compromise](#) by Jemar Tisby.

Discuss

- When we are faced with a hard truth, what are ways we tend to respond? What can help us understand and receive hard truths? (Consider sharing a time when you spoke a hard truth to someone or had someone share a hard truth with you.)
- What is the risk in confronting bias in yourself? What is the risk in confronting bias in people or a system?

 Jesus returns to his hometown after 40 days in the wilderness. This is the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus references stories that are common knowledge for Jewish people: Elijah and the widow from Sidon (1 Kings 17) and Namaan the Syrian healed of leprosy (2 Kings 5). Sidon and Syria were Gentile kingdoms.

Luke 4:14-30

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 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.” 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

- Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 and tells the synagogue attendees that the Isaiah scripture is fulfilled in their hearing. Consider the implications. What is Jesus communicating about himself and his ministry?
- What is the crowd’s reaction and response to Jesus in the beginning versus the end? Why does Jesus’ proclamation in vs. 23-27 provoke such a dramatic shift?
- Take a minute in silence and reflect on the point in the story when emotions turn, and a mob of people start assaulting Jesus, taking him to a cliff, where they intend to kill him. Imagine Jesus’ body, imagine the crowds’ words and actions, imagine the onlookers.
 - Where have you seen violent responses provoked in our community or world? How does this story of Jesus, God incarnate, being on the receiving end of anger and violence impact or inform what you see in the world?
- Additional questions (optional)
 - Put yourself in the scene. How would you describe the tone/feel of the situation as it develops? What are you feeling at various points? (O)
 - What is the Jewish community in Nazareth expecting in Jesus’ homecoming? (I)

- What is the significance of the people that Jesus mentions in verses 25-27, particularly being here in the synagogue? (I)
- (Imagination alternative...) Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the text. Where would you place yourself in this story? Do you see yourself as the "prophet?" Are you in your hometown as the crowd? Have you been on the receiving end of anger or even violence for speaking truth? (A)
- Where have you seen violent responses provoked in our community or world? How can you act or advocate on behalf of those vulnerable to such exclusion/violence? (A)

Summary + Reflection

We saw in the Old Testament that God responds to injustice, both on an emotional level and actively through unlikely people like Moses and like us. God comes down and takes on humanity. Jesus is God in the flesh, responding to injustice with his voice and his body. Jesus is nearly lynched by an angry mob for speaking the truth that God's kingdom is one of freedom, of healing, of liberation, for *all* nations, and not just the Jews. Jesus' message of justice and inclusion for all stirs their ethnic bias. No one intervenes or stands up for Jesus. The gospel of Jesus will be good news to some, and offensive to others. Proclaiming the kingdom of God with urgency and boldness and pursuing shalom for this broken world will up-end the systems of power that depend on the marginalization and oppression of some communities. The good news of Jesus is a threat to the evils of racism and injustice. As you speak truth and work for justice, know that Jesus has gone before you. Jesus has endured opposition, violence, being silenced, and even death.

- Take a minute to pause and listen; how is God speaking to you? How is God calling us to pursue shalom for our communities on campus?

Apply

Spiritual Practice: Visio Divina²

Visio Divina (Latin for "divine seeing") is to pray by using images or other media. Reflecting on art helps us enter into prayer from another angle, expanding or even bringing to the surface unarticulated prayers in our hearts.

Get in a comfortable position ideally in a quiet place. Take a few deep breaths to settle in. Ask God to meet you and direct your prayers as you reflect on this art.

1. Begin by taking in the art below. Look at everything: the colors, the composition, the objects, the lines, etc. Write down a few of your initial thoughts.

"Better World" by [@shinhappens](#)



² Visio Divina reflection adapted from [Carrie Schuliger's](#) "Praying With Art: Visio Divina Guide," July 2017.

2. Look again at the piece more closely. Where are your eyes drawn to? Stay with what is drawing your attention and notice what feelings are evoked. Write down some of the emotions you identified.
3. Now, look away from the art and take a few deep breaths. Spend a few minutes in prayer, talking to God about the part of the image you were drawn to and the emotions that were stirred. Write down anything that you want to remember.
4. Take in the art as a whole one last time, attentive to any ways the Holy Spirit might want to speak to you. As you breathe deeply and slowly, silently offer prayers of gratitude, anguish, confession, or praise. Rest in this moment, receiving God's love and enjoying this moment with Jesus.
5. Amen

Reflect + Share

Journal your responses to these questions, then share them with your group.

- What were you drawn to in the art? What came up for you in prayer?
- How is God speaking to you? How will you respond?

Closing Prayer & Announcements