

February 2, 2025 Luke 4:22-30

The Holy Spirit brings peace and harmony, but the scope of God's work through Christ goes far beyond the desires of one community for healing and prosperity.

Neglect of those closest to you while scattering love and resources to others is a common Christian failing.

People remark that the children of the shoemaker are going barefoot. The family of the village dyer wear clothes made from fabric without color or pattern.

The stereotypical church versions are the wife and children of a traditional pastor wishing he would schedule regular appointments and team meetings with them. The husband of the charitable church woman who says, "Is that for the neighbors?," when a special meal seems to be coming together in the kitchen. The wife who watches her husband give his full attention and charm to church visitors when he barely grunts at home.

Ecumenical and interfaith gatherings and works of mercy can be viewed with suspicion by faith communities who feel their sincere faith is being betrayed.

On a larger scale, people who think of themselves as members of the human race are accused of being race-traitors.

Those who open up community resources to strangers and aliens can be attacked and beaten or killed and have their houses firebombed.

Almost every week, someone who has no connection with our church contacts us for assistance with housing expenses. How can we compassionately balance those requests with needs within the church community?

The best I can understand from the Scriptures of God's ways, we are counted off into small groups in order to listen and care for one another. Household, marriage partner, extended family. Tribe, clan. Language. Geography. Block, village, township, county, state, nation. Vocation. Types of games and sports. Hobbies. Books clubs.

It is very beautiful to see a vast field of people moving together in unison, marching or waving flags or dancing, but experiencing that is also a terrifying. Whether it is an army or small children reciting together, that uniformity speaks of domination. The power of a large group of

people directed by one will, one discipline, is only as great and good as the will that directs them and history bears witness that power corrupts.

Clusters of people are for the purpose of watching out for one another in a way that can't happen in massive configurations. We need boundaries to mark our communities of care and create order for sharing. They are not to absolutely bind or to overpower other groups.

Power belongs to the Lord God, and God's purposes are advanced by his will. Faithfulness, justice and peace are what human beings yearn for, yet there is something in our hearts that chooses, wants to choose, some kind of satisfaction that is different from faithfulness, justice, peace. We don't trust God to meet our needs, unless we have been given grace to hear God's word. So the work of God within small communities is to build trust and safety and faith in God's purposes, in whatever incomplete and mixed-up way we follow God's ways.

The purpose of a group is to protect and nurture and serve. In the case of Israel, God chose Abraham in order to bless every family on earth through his descendants. (Gen 12)

Luke hasn't told us yet about healings in Capernaum. No one in Nazareth is recorded as thinking or saying anything resentful about Christ. Christ's references to the ministries of Elijah and Elisha beyond the boundaries of Israel have no lead-in in the text, so come from his heart.

In his human growth and development, did the Holy Spirit use the plainness and courage of Elijah and Elisha to prepare Jesus for his own ministry? Out of all the Hebrew Scriptures, precedence for the miracles of Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures comes straight out from Elijah and Elisha. Jesus must have recognized and loved their boldness, standing away from the political power of Israel's kings and the crisis of national survival to speak directly for God's interests. Jesus declares that the Year of Jubilee extends beyond the borders of Israel.

The murderous mob impulse arises suddenly. Even in William Penn's Quaker colony, where synagogues and Roman Catholic churches were tolerated, mobs burned Catholic churches and attacked Jewish people from time to time. This will happen to Jesus throughout his ministry but this is the first time and it was the people he grew up with who wanted to kill him.

If we look at the Bible as a whole, God expects us to care for those in the family or groups that we are a part of. Yet, as Jesus lived and expects us to live, family or groups are not our final and ultimate loyalty. As the Holy Spirit leads, we care for those who come into our lives without regard to group boundaries, because God is the creator, sustainer and savior of the whole world.