

Title: Your life is not about you.

Text: Luke 4:21-30

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Objectives:

- Jesus identifies with us when we are not recognized & rejected
 - We are called to recognize the gifts in each other
 - As God's beloved, your life is not about you
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Recognition.

You know that sense, when you walk into a restaurant, and someone looks up, sees you, smiles and waves at you.

Or when you make it through airport security and customs and walk through the glass doors, luggage in tow. And there are your people. They see you, their faces light up and you get ready for your handshake or an embrace.

Recognition. Being seen. Being known.

Charles Taylor writes that "recognition is a vital human need". (*The politics of recognition*)

Jesus arrives in his home town. The Greek calls it "Trephe" the place of his feeding (physical and intellectual nurturing).

Yet in the story, Luke writes Jesus as the embodiment of one who is other, different, marginalized.

After Jesus has read from the prophet Isaiah, the eyes of all were fixed on him, as he spoke wise words. And then they questioned: Isn't this Joseph's son? He was before them as a prophet and yet...

Jesus was not fully recognized. Not trusted. They needed proof.

A gaze can offer affirmation and a gaze can be demeaning.

The way we see another person, can change everything.

A research project that two UBC students carried out, found that students in crisis valued being with someone who knew them over time. For when they looked in their eye's they saw mirrored back to them all of who they were and who they had been. And this moment of crisis and overwhelm was put in perspective.

What a gift we give to each other, when we really 'see' each other. Fully orbed. Not just in this moment but in the context of what it means for us to be a valued member of humanity, God's beloved, a person who has much to give. A human being with much potential. Because as we look with love and recognition at each other, we begin to see it for ourselves.

I was reminded in conversation this week about such a moment in the book and stage play *Les Miserable*. Victor Hugo writes of an escape convict, Jean Valjean who is on the run from the jail guards. He had escaped.

And he takes refuge in the house of a Catholic Priest, a Bishop.

Before dawn the next morning, Jean Valjean had cleared him out of the dining room silver and had fled – back on the run as an escape convict.

At breakfast the bishop and housekeeper realized what had happened.

And then there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said the Bishop.

The door opened. A singular and violent group made its appearance on the threshold. Three men were holding a fourth man by the collar. The three men were armed police; the other was Jean Valjean.

A brigadier, who seemed to be in command of the group, was standing near the door.

He entered and advanced to the Bishop, making a military salute.

"Monseigneur--" said he.

At this word, Jean Valjean, who was dejected and seemed overwhelmed, raised his head with an air of stupefaction.

"Ah! here you are!" the Bishop exclaimed, looking at Jean Valjean. "**I am glad to see you.** Well, but how is this? I gave you the candlesticks too, which are of silver like the rest, and for which you can certainly get two hundred francs. Why did you not carry them away with your forks and spoons?"

Jean Valjean opened his eyes wide, and stared at the venerable Bishop with an expression which no human tongue can render any account of.

After the armed police released Jean Valjean. The Bishop turned to him:

"My friend," resumed the Bishop, "before you go, here are your candlesticks. Take them."

He stepped to the chimney-piece, took the two silver candlesticks, and brought them to Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean was trembling in every limb. He took the two candlesticks mechanically, and with a bewildered air.

"Now," said the Bishop, "go in peace"

"Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I buy from you; I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God."

Recognizing the gifts and values in each other, my friends, is part of integrating all the parts of ourselves. It is a gift to others and it is also a gift to ourselves.
This very act moves us to a place where we can love the parts of ourselves that we do not love. Those shadow parts.

I realize more and more, that the thing I judge or am startled by in someone else's life, is more than likely something I will need to confront in myself at some point in my life. Just give it time. Recognition is a mutual gift.

But *mis*recognition is not all that is going on in Nazareth. That is only one layer of the people's reaction to Jesus.

Fred Craddock writes:

"The problem lies far deeper than blind familiarity. If the people of Nazareth assumed privileges for themselves, that error is joined to a more serious one: resentment that Jesus has taken God's favor to others beyond Nazareth. Especially Capernaum, said to have had a heavy non-Jewish population." (*Luke Commentary*)

They were

"Offended by God's grace for all those for whom they do not approve" (*Luke Commentary*)

Jesus compares his situation with Elijah and Elisha. Both prophets received by people on the outside of Israel.

A widow (already marginalized) from Sidon (a gentile, an enemy of Israel)

A leper (already kept outside) from Syria (a gentile, an enemy of Israel)

That is who Jesus offers his message to.

No wonder the Nazareth community were

"Offended by God's grace – because Jesus offers it to those for whom we do not approve"
(*Luke Commentary*)

No wonder they get angry and not just angry. They get ready to kill him.

I imagine what it must have been like to have been a member of that Synagogue community in Nazareth that day. Imagine growing up with the idea that you are chosen. That you are special – invited by God to be numbered among God's dearly beloved. And at the weekly gatherings we huddled to remind ourselves of this, drawing ever inward, because out there the Roman regime was oppressive.

And then Jesus, a prophet arrives and announces:

"Beloved Ones – I have come to love your enemies."

And this truth can set us free. But like all truth, it first ticks us off.

For imagining people who we just don't get on with. People who might be doing us harm. Imagining them as God's beloved is hard. Its infuriating. It may even call my life and my value into question.

And this kind of love is an invitation.

Knowing we are loved is a doorway to loving others.

It leads us to a deeper mystery – that your life is not about you. My life is not about me.

As Richard Rohr writes:

Once you know that your life is not about you, then you can also trust that your life is your message. This gives you an amazing confidence about your own small life—precisely because *it is no longer a small life, it is no longer just yours, and it is not all in your head.*

(Adam's Return: The Five Promises of Male Initiation)

Your life is bigger than you are imaging it to be. And so is mine.

Now that we are seen, now that we are known, now that we are loved.

Now see others, now get to know the other's perspectives, now love others.

In this season of Epiphany we are reflecting on Our lives of faith.

I have been inviting us to think about the question:

What does it mean for you to live a life of faith?

Today I have asked the Brenda Stenson and Heather Peacock to share their reflections on this question: What does it mean for you to live a life of faith?