

“Mission Rejected” or United Mission?

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When we are united in God’s mission, our United Mission will grow.

In the fourth chapter of Luke, we read of Jesus’ return to his hometown of Nazareth. Verses 18-19 give us Jesus’ words:

*‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has 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 favour.’*

It seemed to some that the unfolding of the hopes of centuries was at hand! The "days are coming" of the prophets was turning into "today."

Jesus had proclaimed the "year of the Lord's favor" (v. 19). The next move was up to the people. How would they respond?

The immediate response of the "hometown folks" to Jesus' comment, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled," was very positive. They were amazed at his words and spoke well of him (v. 22). However, there is an abrupt and grating turn at the end of verse 23.

Dennis Bratcher described their final response that day as “murderous rage.” Why did they change? Jesus understood the motivation of the people. They wanted to claim Jesus for themselves. They wanted Jesus to take care of the local problems at hand before worrying about more far-reaching issues. They had heard about Jesus’ earlier activity in Capernaum. It was as though they were saying: "Why didn't you start out doing those things here first, Jesus?"

There is little doubt about the people’s response to Jesus' words in verse 23: "Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did in Capernaum." Their motive was laid bare! They wanted the future, but they wanted it for themselves!

They were willing to accept Jesus on their terms, for what he could do for them, for the personal advantage that they could claim and enjoy because he was one of them. Perhaps Jesus' words are a cautionary word to congregations today as well.

Even as they herded Jesus out of town to kill him, he slipped away. In Luke's Gospel, he never returned to Nazareth. The next passage tells of Jesus returning to Capernaum and again doing great and wonderful things there, and the reports of him circulated throughout the country (4:37, 43-44).

The contrast could not be greater. Those who should have known Jesus' mission and participated in it, those who knew him best, could see no further than their own wants and their own interests. They drove him out because he had brought them face to face with their own narrowness and closed future. That day the people of Nazareth settled for a God just small enough to meet their own needs.

The shadow of the cross falls over this story. This would not be the last time that Jesus would take the good news to others who were not from his hometown. He would be rejected again.

This "hometown syndrome" affects who we perceive ourselves to be as God's people and how we carry out God's mission. We can become so preoccupied with our own corner of the world that God's work is trivialized into maintenance rather than mission. It is expressed in a willingness to settle for security rather than risk everything for God's mission. The mission has been passed on to his followers, to the church, to us. *It is not ours to reject*, because it is not our mission, but God's mission. It is not our church, but God's church. The whole world awaits.

A true embrace of mission—a true vision of the future—will call us out of our comfort zones, propel us into places that we would not choose, and call us to paths that we would not otherwise walk. The journey may reach far beyond our hometowns and our comfort zones; such is the path of the journey.

Our gifts to United Mission are part of that journey. United Mission provides financial support for American Baptist International Ministries, the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, and to American Baptist Regions.

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Ron