

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY JANUARY 26 2025

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"I Am the Messiah"

Based on Luke 4:14-21

True story. (Please indulge the preacher for those who have heard this before. Sometimes, a story only works for one particular scripture lesson).

A fellow seminary student I studied with did her internship in a rural and quite remote location that shall remain nameless. One rather blustery winter morning, as she was in the middle of her sermon to the tiny congregation, the back doors flew open and snow and sleet began to drift into the back pews.

A man in a long robe and sandals stepped into the church, raised his arms and proclaimed in a loud voice, "I am the Messiah." You can imagine the awkward silence that followed. Without hardly skipping a beat, my fellow student replied, "Jesus! We were just talking about you. Please come in and join us."

Now let's just imagine if something like that were to happen right about now, here

at Knox. What would our reaction be?

- It would start with an uncomfortable silence.
- Silence would slip quickly into a little knot in the pit of our stomachs.
- Anxiety would wash over the pews.
- Your preacher would be getting the cold sweats while trying to appear calm and in control of the situation.

We would be thinking things like...

- Should somebody call 9-1-1?
- Is this a mental health issue?
- Is this going to become a safety issue?
- Is this person high on drugs, or stopped taking his medication?

Ø It is unlikely that one of you would jump up and say, "Glory, Hallelujah! The scriptures have been fulfilled. The promises have been kept!"

Ø It is unlikely that another of you would proclaim, "He said He would return for us. And today is the day. He has come."

And as you would begin to talk quietly amongst yourselves while the police department went through the motions of removing the man from our sanctuary, you would perhaps find yourself saying to the one beside you:

- Who does he think he is, coming in here like that and causing a scene?
- He doesn't look much like a Messiah, now does he?

Which is exactly what happened to Jesus at this moment in the front of the synagogue.

"Who do you think you are, a carpenter's son, coming in here and making a statement like that?"

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (v21)

I am the Messiah. (Ya...right!)

Ø It's rather ironic, though, because the scriptures say that He will return.

Ø What if He did return, and we missed it?

Ø The Jews in the synagogue that day missed it. Would we be any wiser?

Ø We pray for that day (thy kingdom come) yet refuse to believe, that the day might be here.

I think the learning moment is not in the proclamation by Jesus, nor in the arrogant and dismissive response of those in the synagogue in the verses that follow our lesson. The learning moment is in the awkward silence between the two scenes.

If you allow yourself to step back for a moment, there is an enormous expanse of spirit and space between the words, "I am the Messiah" and the emotional response of "Who do you think you are?"

In that moment, and for just a moment, we ponder, "My God, how great thou art." There is a realization of

- Just how big God really is.
- All that He is capable of doing and being.
- The grace and patience He has for us, as we stumble along.
- His power to shift thought and action in the blink of an eye.
- His gentleness to share beauty and wisdom.
- His ability to surprise us, when He presents Himself to us in unexpected places and in unexpected people.

Ø In that moment, we can see also, within ourselves, all that we could be and do for God.

Ø In that moment, all the things we have told ourselves are impossible don't look so impossible, just for a second.

Ø In that moment, we glimpse a world that is hopeful, that cooperates, that cares.

Ø In that moment, we see all the things we claim we want in our prayers.

And then we blink. And it is gone. Wonder disappears just as quickly as it moved within us. Because of fear. Just as quickly as our heart begins to sing with the possibilities of life, that little voice on the other side of our head says,

- Don't be a fool. Stick to the plan.
- It's a figment of your imagination. It isn't possible.
- If you get your hopes up, you will be hurt again. Disappointed. Left behind.

And just like that, instead of the wonder of what might be, we say instead, "Who do you think you are?"

That is fear talking.

- Fear that the Messiah might already be here.
- Fear that He will find us lacking.
- Fear of digging deeper within ourselves; not sure if we are going to like what we see when we get there.

- Fear of how it might change our understanding of the world, of our faith, of Christ Himself.

Could you choose to linger in the wonder, in the space between the possibilities and the put downs?

Could you believe that you are not so small and never lost in God's eyes?

Could you understand that no matter how ready or not you are for God, He will wait patiently for you.

Could you discipline yourself to not allow criticism and doubt and fear take over the wonder?

Could it be that indeed, the Messiah is already here, within you, around you, and out there in the world?
I wonder...

Amen.