

Citizenship 103 (Purpose) –Luke 4:21-30  
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 4th Sunday after the Epiphany (February 3) 2013

<sup>21</sup>And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup>And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" <sup>23</sup>And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." <sup>24</sup>And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.<sup>25</sup>But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, <sup>26</sup>and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.<sup>27</sup>And there were many lepers<sup>28</sup> in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." <sup>28</sup>When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. <sup>29</sup>And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. <sup>30</sup>But passing through their midst, he went away.

In this sermon series Citizenship 101 through 104, we are taking a quick look at the most important thing Jesus taught – in his preaching, in his miracles, in his teaching, in his living, in his dying, and in his living: the Kingdom of Heaven (Kingdom of God.) What does it mean for us to claim OUR citizenship in this Kingdom – or, as Paul says, to be AMBASSADORS for that Kingdom in this place. What does it mean for us who operate out of this embassy called Saint Marks?

In the **first lesson (101)** we looked at our **IDENTITY: We are beloved children of God, precious and beautiful to behold.** That is who we are. That is the location and origin of our worth, our value. We do not have to aspire to BECOME ANYTHING in order to be worth something. We already are. It comes from the King, from the Creator, in Whose very image we have been lovingly made.

In the **second lesson (102)** we learned our **PURPOSE.** It came from the scripture verses immediately before today's lesson. Jesus is back home, in Nazareth, and he preaches to them his INAUGURATION address – saying what his life and ministry are all about:

**Turning things upside down - good news to the poor;  
release for the captives; recovering of sight to the blind;  
setting at liberty those who are oppressed; and  
proclaiming the year of the Jubilee**

Today's scripture gives us (as Paul harvey used to say): **The Rest of the Story.**

How does the hometown crowd respond to Jesus' purpose? At first, they were pleased that their "favorite son" had turned out well. But, then, when he began to amplify the message – when he began to say things that they did not want to hear, they decided to throw him off a cliff on the edge of town.

I shall long remember the ONLY time I went back to my hometown church (the church I attended as a lay person and out of which I was called to seminary and ordained ministry.) I had often preached there as a layperson. But this was my first time back to do so as an ordained clergy person. The lectionary text for that Sunday was the same text I'm preaching on today. I was so frightened that they might think their job was to throw me off the high level bridge just a few blocks away from the church. (You know there is always the fear that ushers have when the scripture comes up about Jesus cleansing the temple of the money changers that someone will do bad exegesis and say, "Let's get the ushers!.")

Jesus' situation today shows us the gravamen of the third Civics Lesson for the Kingdom of Heaven: **THERE ARE COSTS TO BEING A CITIZEN OF THIS KINGDOM.**

If you do the work of the Kingdom, then there are costs that must be paid.

Jesus – at another place in his teachings – told his listeners that it is **incumbent on every disciple to first sit down and count the cost**

**before moving forward.**

**Jesus NEVER** soft pedaled the citizenship of the Kingdom of Heaven as being a cushy thing that is all about Me, Me, Me. **The first shall be last and the last shall be first**, said he. Actually (I soon found out as I was doing the preparation for this wee homily) if I went through the four Gospels and just lifted up ALL the places where Jesus gave a heads up about what cost can be involved – that would take up all my allotted time.

**Jesus was fine, in today's scripture, until he went from preaching to meddling.**

So, too, Christians in today's culture, are altogether fine so long as they preach the **CULTURAL GOSPEL** – say only those things that go along with what the great majority of the people want to hear.

Again – I could use up all my allotted time – to give examples from Jesus' mouth of how many ways our current cultural folklore about Jesus that we pander as religion are not at all what Jesus was about. It sells the product, because it never challenges people. But it's not REALLY the good news.

Suffice it to say – **when we preach, teach, live the Kingdom of Heaven as Jesus taught it** – it will cause some people to turn away.

**I had a fellow tell me one time – I saw him out at a public function – why he had quit coming to church. He said he had gotten a letter from the Church asking him to pledge, or to tithe. He said that he couldn't afford to come to this Church anymore. He also said that he was negotiating with another Church in town, where he thought he could get in for about half the price.**

I didn't try to soft soap the Gospel and tell him that there was not cost. I told him that we missed him and hoped he would return.

- You can't be a citizen of America without paying a cost.
- You can't be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven without paying a cost.
- Anyone who tells you otherwise about either of these two is not speaking the truth.

As the tear off tab of the bulletin makes the comparison between these two citizenships, in each of these first three sermons, it's like the Marine Corps PR campaign: **we are not looking for applications, we are accepting commitments.** It applies to both.

- Anyone who tells you otherwise about either of these two is not speaking the truth.

I also thought about listing for us today just what that cost will be; just what that commitment will entail. But, if I gave every possible example then we would miss kick off at 6:30 this evening.

So I thought, instead, that we would do it liturgically. Turn now to the reference in the bulletin that are listed after the homily. Let's go through these membership vows.

That's what's required.

Let me say just TWO more things:

- (1) **we don't get to pick** our cross, our cost. **[Tell the story of the college student in the chapel.]**
- (2) **We don't** have to do it on our own. **All we have to do is**

**let go and let God, Who will ALWAYS empower us to meet the cost. God never calls us to what God will not empower us.**

- It's pass fail.
- We are either in or we are out.
- But we don't have to do it on our own strength. Our own bank account.
- Remember when Jesus asked the man if he believed enough for Jesus to heal his son, the man replied, "I believe; help my unbelief." And that was enough.

**You must pay the cost. But the biggest cost of all is trusting that God will cover whatever check God asks you to write.**

- Are ye **able**? Of course. With God all things are possible.
- Are ye **willing**? Ah! THAT is the question: are ye willing to trust God to cover whatever check God asks you to write.
- What say you?
- **We are not looking for applications, we are accepting commitments.**

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.**