

Sunday February 3, 2019  
First Lutheran Church, Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 4:16-21

Pastor Doug Larson

Dear Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

In the cartoon, “Zits”, Jeremy’s mother hears a strange thumping sound from upstairs. As she moves towards her son Jeremy’s room, it continues: “Thump-thump”! As she opens the door, she sees Jeremy shooting a basketball off the walls and ceiling, trying to hit a fly in the room. She says, “Haven’t you heard of a flyswatter!” Jeremy responds, “Think outside the box, Mom!” Thinking outside the box refers to thinking in new and creative ways, unconventional ways. So trying to hit a fly with a basketball fits into “thinking outside the box.” Businesses encourage thinking outside the box in order to find new ways of doing business.

Our Lord, our God, is a God that thinks outside the box. Of the major religions of the world, Christianity is the only religion that has a god that comes down into our world. The others see god as something one has to find, go to, discover, to be good enough to approach a god. But the Christian faith believes that God came into our world in the person of Jesus. Born in a stable in Bethlehem, raised in the town of Nazareth, skilled as a carpenter, baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus is where God meets humans. That is really thinking outside the box; to come into our world to bring salvation to us, as a gift of God.

In our Gospel text, Jesus comes to His home town for Sabbath worship. He is asked to read a scripture and speak on it. He chooses the 61<sup>st</sup> Chapter of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom to those in prison and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Then He sits down and says, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one of God who comes into our world with salvation! Out of the box thinking!

Jesus then begins to live out this thinking. He goes to the sinners and tax collectors and is criticized for eating and drinking with them. If He is the Christ, he should be with the rich, the healthy, and the religiously good people. Jesus, sitting at a well in Samaria in the heat of the day, talks to a woman who comes to draw water. She is shocked because Jews don’t speak to Samaritans; a man doesn’t talk to woman he doesn’t know; and she has a dark past and yet this man talks with her. Jesus comes upon a funeral procession in which a young man, the only son of his mother, a widow, is being carried out to the cemetery. Jesus stops the procession, touches the stretcher, which isn’t done because that would contaminate Jesus and require Him to go through a ritual cleansing of a week or two. Jesus then says to the dead man, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And he does, as if only in a sleep. Jesus tells the religious leaders that it is not what goes into a person’s mouth that makes them unclean, but what comes out of their heart! Jesus, at a Passover meal takes bread and says that this is His body, given for them like His body will be given on the cross. He takes wine and says this is His blood, shed for all, which will happen on the cross the next day. All these instances of Jesus’ ministry come from Jesus’ thinking outside the box.

Jesus thinks and lives outside the box. The opposite of thinking outside the box can be summed up in the seven last words of the church: But we've always done it this way. There was a church that was discussing whether to move to English or keep services in Norwegian. After much heated debate, Ole stands up to settle the question, "If Norwegian was good enough for Jesus; it ought to be good enough for us!"

My first parish was at Cormorant, over by Detroit Lakes. One summer a previous pastor came through and told me it was his first church in 1946. He said they required him to preach in Norwegian once a month. He protested, saying his Norwegian wasn't good enough. They insisted. So he did, but he told me that at the next Annual Meeting they voted to stop it. I looked up the minutes of that meeting and found this: "Selmer Jacobson stood up and said that the preacher, preaching in Norwegian is worse than no preaching at all." Holding to the seven last words of the church can be disastrous.

Wednesday evening worship, Saturday worship, a food pantry at a church, mission trips, people being encouraged to start ministries that they think need to be done are all examples of thinking outside the box. They were new, radical and they worked. In my time at Grace Lutheran in Mora, we struggled with very few children in worship. Kids were dropped off and picked up later. We decided to think outside the box and determined that Sunday School would start in worship at 9:15, in the second service. Then after the children's sermonette, they would be released to the second part of their Sunday School. Parents were informed that they had to be in worship with their children or maybe another church in town might be a better fit for them. The parent responded almost unanimously.

But we also allowed children at age six to be instructed in Holy Communion. They would come back into worship for Holy Communion, but this involved someone telling them how close they were to that in the service and it also messed up their lesson time. One morning, after about a year of this, I had a thought: What if we move Holy Communion to the early part of the service? So we did. Worship began with a hymn, Confession and Forgiveness, Announcements and then moved into the Communion liturgy. It worked! Out of the box thinking!

What is your out of the box thinking in relation to the church, to its mission and ministry? What is the Holy Spirit working in you to enable the good news of Jesus Christ to be more effectively shared? King Agrippa questioned the apostle Paul once and said, "So you are one of those who are turning the world upside down." Our Lord thinks outside the box. Jesus lived a ministry that was outside the box. We have been a part of thinking outside the box. In these next two weeks, I ask you to attend one of the "Who Are We Now?" sessions to contribute to the picture of who we are as church. That is needed to know what qualities and abilities we need in the next senior pastor. It is also a time for God's Holy Spirit to help us think outside the box for the glory of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

