

The 3-Minute Honeymoon – Luke 4: 21-30
Sermon prepared and preached by Rev. Don Hammond
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My old car is a comfortable old car. I like it and am happy to have it. My car is 14 years old and has nearly 300,000 miles on it. Every once in awhile I become concerned about driving a car that old and with that many miles on it, but it is comfortable and I fit in it just right.

When I served the Boise UCC congregation I worried more about the car than I do now because I was driving 270 miles roundtrip just to go to work. Here it is only 10 miles. Here was my problem – I don't like the process of buying a car. I would rather walk over hot coals than go through the negotiations, haggling and tensions that are always experienced when buying a car.

Only two blocks away from a church I served and, along the route I needed to drive on my way home, was a used car lot. For two years I looked at that lot and wondered if I would ever, or who (if anyone) would ever, buy a car from that business. The name on their big sign in front of all those used cars read (I will change the name of the person:

Fairly Reliable John's Used Cars

Why would anyone want to buy a car from such a place? Does "Fairly Reliable" mean the cars are "fairly reliable" or does it mean that John is "fairly reliable," or does it mean both? Regardless of which way you look at it, it's bad. When I buy a car I want to know that three minutes after I drive off the lot, regardless of what might go wrong with it, that the place and people I bought it from are reliable. Doesn't "unreliable" mean the same as "fairly reliable"?

Three minutes isn't much time, but sometimes three minutes is all it takes for something good to become something bad. When Jesus was asked to read the Scripture in the synagogue, it took him about 3 minutes to complete the reading. The Gospel tells us that during those three minutes he received lots of accolades and affirmation for his reading, not because he was a good reader but because he was reading a good piece of scripture, scripture that the worshipers liked to hear. Three minutes after the reading,

their pleasure with Jesus ended. In three minutes he turned their own scripture against their traditional expectations of its meaning, and at that moment, the honeymoon was over! Three minutes after his reading the crowd moved from admiration to execution. In three minutes Jesus went from popular hometown boy to an insolent, insulting, and offensively brazen fool.

I have had some success at offending people in my life, but I was never good enough to turn a group of people from love to hate in three minutes. Jesus was really good at many things, and now here is another to add to his resume. I can see it in his diary

“Today I preached in my hometown synagogue and after three minutes they tried to kill me.”

The word “honeymoon” has meaning beyond the early part of a marriage. We use it in the church to describe the early relationship with a new pastor. After a new pastor arrives it is generally understood that the “honeymoon” lasts about a year. That is how long it normally takes before congregation and pastor will talk about each other’s faults – kind of like a marriage. Can you imagine a scenario where a preacher finishes a sermon and is immediately run out of town?

I listened to a story told by another pastor. He told me that his father was a Southern Baptist preacher and had a church somewhere in the Deep South. His father was in that congregation for 18 months, and was consistent with his positions on the big issues like civil rights. One Sunday morning during his sermon, a deacon stood and said to the congregation “we are going to have a meeting right here, right now. We are going to take vote whether or not to keep this preacher. All those in favor of firing him raise their hand.” Most the congregation raised their hand and his father was fired before he ever had a chance to finish the sermon. The man telling the story said that it took that congregation 18 months to figure out that his father mean what he said, and they did not like what he was saying. It is true, following Jesus will get a person into trouble - after all, being Jesus got Jesus into trouble! The honeymoon did not last long for Jesus, so why should any one of us expect it to be any different for us?

“Trouble” is not what most Christians who come to worship on Sunday morning want to hear. Most want some kind of comfort, which is exactly what they wanted the

day Jesus preached in Nazareth. Most Christians want to hear that Jesus is going to calm the troubled waters of life, perhaps perform a miracle or two, give some good words with hope. What is odd is that this is not what he did with his own life. Jesus got into more trouble in his three years of ministry than a room full of preachers can get into in a lifetime!

There is a story about a young man who was recently married. He was having some difficulties with an inferiority complex and he repeated "I am just a little pebble on a big beach, just a little pebble, just a little pebble."

The marriage counselor, trying to be creative, told him, "If you wish to save your marriage, you'd better be a little boulder."

Not a bad thought for Christians. If you see yourself a little pebble on a huge beach, then the only way to overcome that is to become a little boulder. But beware, becoming "a little boulder" can lead to a short honeymoon. If you don't think that is true then you need to go back and reread what happened throughout Jesus' three years of ministry – he had many short honeymoons.

This past week I heard some significant challenges spoken about the future of the Church. The one that forced me to think the most was in reference to the electronic media – the Internet and the computer world. Now, let me be upfront and admit that if I had my computer and Internet taken away from me, I would really miss it! I am hooked on it as much as anyone, but this is what was said in a responsible paraphrase:

"Churches that don't understand and don't jump into the electronic social networking will not have access to young people."

I suspect there is truth to that, and it will be a necessity for the church to be attentive to all the electronic and networking processes of today and tomorrow. But here is my next thought – electronic networking will NEVER replace the church.

-One of the wonderful traditions of Hawaii is the greeting and farewell of "Aloha." It means "with breath."

Ancient Hawaiians would greet and bid farewell to each other by the pressing of their foreheads together and breathing each other's breath. It was believed that the breath of each of us is what gives us life so; in the breathing of

each other's breath we exchange each other's life and spirit. Even in Christianity we claim the Spirit of God is the breath of God that gives us life.

When Westerners went to Hawaii, they would not participate in the exchanging of breath. Their refusal confused the Hawaiians, for how else can you embrace the other's spirit if you don't exchange breath? There was no way for the Hawaiian people to explain that refusal, and they identified those people as Haloies, which literally means "no breath." The social network has "no breath." Computers have no breath. A task of the Church that is now, and must always be, is to be the place where people experience the exchanging of breath. The breath, thus spirit of a life, can never be transported electronically.

It was the refusal to exchange breath with people beyond their own comfortable surroundings that turned the friendly people of Nazareth into the hostile people of Nazareth who declared an end to the honeymoon with Jesus after three minutes. Jesus told them what they did not want to hear, that the breathing spirit of life is not exclusively theirs. They could not capture and hold the breathing spirit of God. Jesus told them the breathing spirit of life includes even the people they did not like and preferred to never encounter. He told them that the breathing spirit of life did not belong to them alone and with that, the honeymoon was over.

William Willimon relates a story about a group of seminarians that were engaged in a discussion of student sermons in the preaching class. If you have never heard a student seminarians sermon, well, let me say they are often interesting.

One of the members of the class had preached the previous Sunday in the church he was serving, and was saddened that a number of his rural parishioners expressed anger because of his sermon. One man had even walked out before the singing of the final hymns.

Attempting to be helpful, members of the class jumped into a discussion of what the new preacher had done wrong. Had he overstated his arguments in the sermon? Had he spent enough time developing personal relationships with his people? Had he spoken in too strong or harsh a tone of voice?

The crusty old homiletics professor listened to the discussion and then finally said, “did it ever occur to any of you that perhaps what he did wasn’t wrong; it was right? I’m bothered by the assumption that many of you seem to have it that there is some way to talk about Jesus without getting hurt for doing so. Let me assure you, none of you are smarter than Jesus. Jesus got into trouble for his preaching; so will you!” Perhaps the addendum to that story would be – if you don’t get into some trouble, are you really preaching?

Jesus knew all about 3 Minute Honeymoons, but also knew a lot about trouble. Did you know the congregation that Martin Luther King Jr. first interviewed with turned him down? He was too young and had too much vinegar. The Christians we remember also hold similar traits; they got themselves into a peck of trouble. Perhaps we, the Church, have created a Jesus who is too nice, too comfortable, and too helpful. Perhaps we have created a Jesus who is too soft and tender. Perhaps we have created a Jesus who is too much of a refuge. When I read the Gospels I find a Jesus who was always getting into trouble, and always followed his time of trouble with an invitation to “follow” him. If you don’t believe that, then perhaps you are missing the best part of Christianity and being a Christian. I suppose what really matters is, are you reliable enough that Jesus would turn around and see you following?

Amen