

*21Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" 23He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" 24And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 25But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." 28When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.*

When I was a child, growing up, I always knew that my parents were committed to keeping things equal between my siblings and me. If one received special attention every effort was made to give the same degree of attention to the others. If an opportunity was provided for one of us, that same opportunity was provided for the others.

But there was one thing that separated me from my sisters and brother. My mother had prayed a prayer before I was born. She promised me to God. I was chosen. Very early she told me of her prayer, her hope that I would be a pastor.

When the day of my ordination came, my family and the whole church gathered. My mother secretly delayed cancer surgery to be a part of that day, a delay that may have cost her life. That day I was honored by the whole community in a way that no one else in my family was ever honored. Somehow I think that my being chosen, being honored has always been a barrier.

I know that whenever another is chosen in a way that I am not, I struggle not to be envious. When a neighbor comes home with a shiny new car, I ask why him and not me. When people my age tell me of time spent with their parents, I wonder why their parents are alive and not mine. When one of you visits another church and tells me how marvelous the sermon was, I find it hard to rejoice over that news.

As I think about the stories of the Bible, from the very beginning there is favoritism. God regarded the offering of Abel, Cain's offering God rejected. And we are never told why.

Abraham was called by God out of all the people on the earth to be the father of a chosen nation. Jacob was picked over Esau, the young boy Joseph told in a dream that God

planned that his father and mother and brothers would all bow down to him. Moses was chosen by God - Saul - David. And all the unchosen ones fade out of focus and are forgotten.

When Jesus came to his hometown to preach, at first the people received him warmly. We read, all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

But Jesus began to speak - listen to his words.

*"Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'"* 24 *And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."*

When the people understood what he was saying, they were filled with rage for Jesus was saying, "I am choosing to bless others, but not you."

Their response was the response of Cain, the response of the brothers of Joseph.

They wanted to kill him.

What do I do when another's house is large and mine is small?

What do I do when another is given the gift of being comfortable around people and I am shy?

What do I do when my loved ones are taken by death, or sickness, and my neighbor's family is all gathered every Christmas and Easter?

The people of Jesus hometown might have rejoiced over the outpouring of blessings that others were receiving through Jesus. I could give thanks that others have not endured the losses that I have.

I will never understand why. Why did God choose Jeremiah before he was born? Why did God choose you for the life that has been yours? Why did Jesus not do a miracle there in Nazareth?

I will never understand. But in our second lesson, Paul says there is something a whole lot more important than understanding.

Love - when all our knowledge is gone and forgotten, love will remain.

You are one of the chosen ones of God. You have been blessed with faith in Jesus Christ. The why of that choice is an absolute mystery.

But you who have been loved in Christ are sent out to be love. You are sent to rejoice with those who rejoice, to weep with those who weep.

How different the story of Nazareth would be had those hometown folks simply rejoiced that the blind would see, and captives would be freed and that good news would be preached to the poor in Jesus. Then their neighbors blessing would have been their blessing also.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you love. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you love that is patient and kind, love that is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Pray that the Spirit of God will give you love, not insisting on your own way, or being irritable or resentful, not rejoicing in wrongdoing but rejoicing in the truth. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you love that never ends. Amen.