

In August of last year, the *Washington Post* published an article that began with a rather enticing question. It asked, “What do Sting, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet have in common?” Sting, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. **Think you know the answer? I’ll give you a minute (pause). Have you figured it out yet?** I bet not. The article actually answers the question in the very next sentence. It says, “All three have huge fortunes, and none of them are giving it to their kids.”

“I certainly don’t want to leave them trust funds that are albatrosses round their necks,” Sting told the *Daily Mail* in June. “They have to work. All my kids know that and they rarely ask me for anything, which I really respect and appreciate.” Phillip Seymour Hoffman, a famous actor who tragically died just last year, was on record for saying he didn’t want what he called “Trust fund kids.” Celebrity Chef Nigella Lawson once said, “I am determined that my children should have no financial security. It ruins people not having to earn money.”

So then here’s my next question. What do Sting, Bill Gates, Warren Buffet and Jesus have in common? **The answer might not be as elusive now, but nevertheless still surprising and we find it in today’s Gospel from St. Luke.** “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” Jesus said, “because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” Well, it’s obvious the kids of those famous celebrities wouldn’t be poor, exactly, but what I’m getting at here is that all four have in common a desire to abolish the mindset of entitlement.

Luke tells the story today in chapter 4 of Jesus returning to His hometown. Now many of us just did this a month ago. We went back home for Christmas. We returned to the home towns where we grew up and we got to see all those pictures of us hanging on the wall that we wish our

parents never took; maybe we slept in our old rooms and watched the snow fall out the same windows we did when we were kids. I bet you always get a little nostalgic when you go home.

Well, Jesus is apparently not feeling too sentimental today. There He is in the synagogue He grew up in seeing all those same people who had known Him for nearly twenty-some years. And everything is going well, at first. **“All spoke well of him,” Luke tells us. “Is this not Joseph’s son” they say.** See, Jesus doesn’t even have his own identity yet...probably like you still don’t when you go home. “Oh wow, you’ve gotten so big...I’m 35 now, thanks.”

But everyone is so impressed with Jesus, though maybe at the same time, still incredulous. The fact that Jesus had done a sign in Capernaum doesn’t really sway them or convince them that He has divine origins. And now Jesus just pulls the rug out from under them as He deliberately irks them. He goes into this tour of Biblical history where He talks about how the Israelites of the past were spurned by the prophets and these non-Israelites were the beneficiaries of God’s grace. **Elijah goes to this town of Sidon and helps this Gentile widow; Elisha cleanses this enemy general from Syria named Naaman of his leprosy.** And so in less than a minute, Jesus just crushes and condemns any sense of entitlement the people in the synagogue thought they might’ve had. And not even nostalgia for His hometown would change that.

Now also remember something, this isn’t modern day Westernized Judaism where we’ve all been taught to be tolerant and nice and whateverish. No, this is Middle Eastern first century Judaism. The passionate and absolute devotion that we see among many of the Middle Eastern Islamic religion today was every bit as embraced and practiced by the Jews of Jesus’ time and He just basically put them all down. So you see what happens in verse 28, “All in the synagogue were filled with wrath.”

See, there is an insinuation in Jesus' words that God loved these foreigners more than His own people. Even in Nazareth, far away from the super religiously devoted capital of Jerusalem, there were still strong convictions and expectations. People there possessed the belief that they were entitled to God's blessings and His gifts even apart from faith in God's Messiah. And that's the point Jesus is making here. Seeing Him as the fulfillment of Isaiah is not optional.

Now God had made His promises and He had made His covenant with their forefathers. **The residents of Nazareth were the descendants and they were under the impression that being a beneficiary was just automatic by birth.** You're born a Jew, you are one of God's chosen people and you are entitled to everything from Him that's good and beneficial. And Jesus just comes and steps on that. Now it's not so much that they weren't trust fund kids, to borrow the metaphor, but the real problem was that they had this trust fund kids' attitude. You may have heard that story in Manhattan last year about the 30 year old son of a millionaire hedge fund founder who actually took his father's life when his dad cut his allowance by \$200 a month. And that's really and ironically the direction the crowd goes in today when Jesus essentially does the same thing. They want to throw Him off the cliff because He's threatening what they feel they're owed from God.

Entitlement is such a powerful thing. **We think something is ours and how quickly we can throw out our temperament, our civility, and even our religious instruction to retain it.** You know, when Jesus preaches these words to the people at the synagogue today, there's not even a hint of anyone asking the question of whether or not He's right. The offense of being insulted just completely suspends any consideration for the truth of His preaching. And we need to be conscious of that too. You should be offended at times, when you hear the sermon or if I'm

counseling you in my office. Ultimately, God not only intends to draw you to Himself, but He desires to keep you there. The Word of God doesn't complement attitudes of entitlement. God's promises to us should not lead us towards taking him for granted. New life with Christ does not mean life with Christ on your terms.

See, the people of Nazareth thought that if Jesus does miracles in Capernaum, then He should do the same or more for his hometown. **They thought they were owed. They thought they were entitled.** And we can make assumptions about Jesus too in that way. We can think that we can live life on our own terms simply because His Name is on our lips.

You know, we start some of our services here at Holy Shepherd with the confession that says that we are poor miserable sinners and that we deserve God's temporal and eternal punishment. This is how we acknowledge our unentitlement and spiritual poverty before God. If there is something we are entitled to, it is not God's grace, it is His wrath.

"But I pray you of your boundless mercy," we continue, "To be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being." See, the confession of sins reflects everything Jesus is getting at here in Luke 4. **Christ, who is rich in mercy and grace, who pours out His gifts during Epiphany, welcomes all sinners humbled by the Law,** who then seek to be comforted by the Good News of salvation. Christ forgives you; Christ redeems you; Christ claims you on account of this work. We saw that this morning in baptism. He makes you His Naaman who is cleansed in the Jordan; He makes you His widow whom He cared for in the foreign land of Sidon. In Jesus, it is those who have been crushed by the Law's condemnation who hear the Good News as Good News. We are justified by grace through faith and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, Paul tells the Ephesians.

We are heirs of God's grace and mercy through Christ and we realize that this is not deserved or earned. The final words of Martin Luther were, "We are beggars, this is true." A beggar is one who receives only what is given him and he is grateful. **As Christians, we receive the law's assessment of our poverty, but are raised up in the Gospel's assurance** of His wealth in Christ. In this way, our unentitlement is replaced with the promise of salvation and the Good News becomes our eternal joy in anticipation of our life with Christ in the world to come. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.