SERMON NOTES — February 2, 2025

Jesus's Inaugural Sermon, Part 2

- "Previously," last week Jesus read from Isaiah 61 and proclaimed himself the coming of Jubilee: a societal reset when all are placed on an equal footing — debts cancelled, slaves freed, property and wealth redistributed.
- This week Jesus challenges any nationalistic way of hearing this promise as "Israel first" — by using examples of the prophets Elijah and Elisha extending God's promises to foreigners, 'outsiders'
- His hometown crowd is apparently hearing it through nationalistic ears and become enraged, trying to force Jesus off of a cliff.

We need to hear this story as not about Them, Jesus' neighbors, but about Us, in the sense that we human beings have shown ourselves to be highly susceptible to "Us first" thinking. Tragically, Christians have used this story, along with the story of the cross, to spawn anti-Semitism throughout our history. But these stories — Jesus' Inauguration and his choosing to go to the cross — are meant to do the opposite!! They are intended for us to be able to see the half-truth thinking of nationalism as shaping our human history. We think God is blessing us above and beyond all others, instead of understanding that God is blessing us for the sake of the others. Believing the half-truth of God blessing us leads to things like the cross and a history of nationalism.

I end today with this story of broken truth in a beautiful children's picture book, *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*, by Douglas Wood.

It begins in a land far away — and close at the same time, as all good stories do — when a Truth descends from the heaven like a meteor. It is a stone with a message, but it breaks in two as it rockets to earth. On this one half of a stone is written, "You are loved." Wood writes,

> The man held it carefully, thinking it was the loveliest thing he had ever seen. He tucked the broken truth into a safe place and kept it. Sometimes he would take it out and admire it. And the truth sparkled just for him, and whispered its message to him alone. And the man thought he had never felt so proud and so happy.
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> The man took the wonderful truth to his people. . . . After awhile, the man and his people . . . heard only their truth. . . . And they called it . . . The Truth. The Truth made the people good and proud and strong. But soon they also began to feel fear and even anger toward those who were not like themselves and did not share their truth. The other beings and other people of the lovely land seemed less and less important. . . .
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> Time passed, and *other* people said, "We must have this Great Truth for ourselves, for with it comes great happiness and power." Many battles were fought, and the broken truth was won and lost, won and lost, over and over again. But such was its power and beauty that no one ever doubted it, and when they were without it, they felt a great emptiness where their truth had been. The stones and trees suffered. The breezes and waters suffered, and the animals, and the earth . . . . And most of all, the people suffered.

What a familiar story, right? It ends with the other half of the Truth: