

Some of you may not know this, that my wife Anita is one of a set of identical triplets. People ask me all the time if I had trouble telling them apart, and the truth is I knew Anita for several months before I met either of the other sisters and by then I had down which one I loved best. But the photos of them growing up and into high school show how very alike they were.

Anita tells the story of when she was in high school and she and her mother were in town. Her mother is a farm girl and a seamstress, so much of what the girls wore was homemade. Nice, but not really the style. Anita had a pair of name brand blue jeans, one pair, and they were not really up to date, so she nearly fainted when her mother suggested they look at blue jeans at a department store. They looked and her mother asked Anita about this pair and that, and she tried on a few and finally they chose a perfect pair of Levis and home they went. Anita was so pleased. She also had to fight the rising triumphant feeling in her, that she was getting new jeans and the other two were not.

When they got home her mother took the bag and went down to her sister Annette's room, and handed her the jeans. It turns out Annette's out

of style jeans had worn out on one knee and she needed a pair of name brand jeans. Anita was a perfect model for her mother's practical shopping need; but, Anita, naturally, felt crushed. I mean, really, was this fair?

Nazareth is a town with history. Two hundred years before the birth of Jesus, when the Maccabean revolution had thrown the Greeks out of Jerusalem, the newly established kingdom of Judea sent settlers out to re-establish and plant new communities in Galilee. Nazareth was one of the new towns. They had to eke out a living among the various other people settled in the area, and among absentee landowners from other nations. It was like a settlement of the old west – they had to fight for what they got and struggle to hold onto it. Over time, Nazareth became a town linked with a few others in Galilee associated with religious and political extremists – zealots – who had a cause to fight for and a story to tell. Far enough away from Jerusalem they kind of had their own take on things. One of the scripture passages folks of their persuasion latched on to was Isaiah 61 – which among other things promised that they would rule over the non-Jews, the Gentiles, and make servants of these folk, and take possession of their treasures. They may have taken it out of context, but

they were not the first nor the last to do that. They looked about at the people around them who posed a constant threat – and generation after generation they looked with fear and loathing, mixed with a bit of spiritual pride.

That is such a human thing. For folks who have grown up in this area there used to be a certain derision with which folks from states far away were viewed, especially when they drove slowly on mountain roads or moved in and ran for local office! Drive right, and, they're not from here and we don't do it like that!

It is to this serious attitude that Jesus is speaking when he comes back home and steps up to and reads from the old favorite, Isaiah 61, and instead of pouring it on about being the chosen ones who will triumph over and rule the Gentiles, Jesus stops after the first brief verses. And all the eyes are on him. Instead of beginning a healing ministry, Jesus has some hard words – drawn from scripture, about how God's mercy was given in the famine of Elijah's day not to the starving chosen people, but to a Gentile widow; and how there were plenty of chosen people who needed healing from leprosy in Elijah's day but none was made clean except a Gentile.

This is what upset them. He applied his lesson from Isaiah in the opposite direction they were expecting. They thought he was measuring them for a new pair of jeans but then he put them on all the neighbors, on all the Gentiles. Whoa!

Jesus told them that he was proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord – and he was referring to the Jubilee, that big idea in Leviticus that does not get practiced. That law in the book of Leviticus that says the land will lie unplowed and unplanted once every seven years, and all the livestock will be left to pasture once every seven years, and once every forty nine years all debts will be forgiven, and everyone will move back to their original tribal land allotment. It is an idea too big to be practical but a powerful message that says – this land is your land, this land is my land – it is for everyone. And it seems like Jesus just may be going back over the whole story, reinterpreting Abraham’s promise about what the land means, and how God’s people are supposed to be with it and on it and sharing it.

Set everybody free; give back what has been lost; restore what is taken; proclaim a new creation. Blue jeans for everybody – this is Jesus’ mission statement.

Anita then and Anita now strives to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus. She felt anger and resentment, but she waited and she understood. Communication about what was going on could have been better, but she got over it and saw the wisdom in it.

Those people in Nazareth took Jesus out to cliff side to shut him up. It was too much to be confronted with the dark thoughts of their own hearts.

It is a funny thing, and I guess, a sad thing that somehow what we have been promised or what we think we have that someone else does not have is more precious to us because someone else does not have it. I have long wondered how it is that someone who is persuaded by the Spirit that they have received salvation through Christ can be upset by the suggestion of someone else that Christ's salvation might be universal – for everyone whether they accept it or not. Is my salvation made more precious by limiting who has or may receive it? It is Jesus' to give, and his mission statement is pretty broad, his grace is casting a wide net.

I enjoyed watching Clint Eastwood in a film he directed, *Gran Torino*, where he plays a Vietnam Veteran and retired auto worker who

build the Gran Torino muscle car, one of which he owns. But he is an unhappy sort. The things he fought to preserve and the things that define him are shifting and slipping. His prejudices move front and center when the house next door is leased by people from SE Asia, and they disrupt his world.

The long and short of the story is that these new neighbors refuse to be ignored. He may be the one who has standing, and he may be the one who has every claim on being there first, and part of the ethnic majority and the ruling race, but his fortress behavior cannot keep out the neighbors and their unwillingness to accept him as anything other than a full person in their world. He tried to draw a circle and include them out, but they drew their circle and included him in.

It is always a choice to live Jubilee or not. And sometimes, by God's grace, when we refuse to embody Jubilee, someone else chooses to make us the object of their Jubilee.

Jesus came to Nazareth and laid down his mission statement, the good news he was anointed, set apart, by God to proclaim – freedom, release,

compassion, a new time, a new era in the world. And not just for some, but for everyone.

That is good news for this crazy, mixed-up, broken world. There are days, though, when I have my boundaries drawn tight around me and I may not get too bothered at the rabble who is going to toss the messenger of this news off a cliff. But then there was the day my battery died when I was giving a ride to someone over in a trailer park and people who barely speak my language helped me. And there is the day I must help someone who is so unlike my carefully constructed self, and the gratitude is so sincere and heartfelt that it works a change in me. And you and I both know that in this is the reality of the Jubilee Jesus has come to proclaim and to make real. Yeah, I've got my blue jeans – and so everybody else ought to have theirs, too.

The effective love of God revealed to us in Jesus keeps turning the world, changing the perspective, drawing the circle wider, and teaching us how to follow, to follow him, because he is on a mission to make a whole new world, to flip the calendar to a whole new year, the acceptable year of the Lord – Jubilee. Amen.