

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR C – JANUARY 30, 2022

First Reading

Jer 1:4-5. 17-19

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah

I have appointed you as prophet to the nations.

In the days of Josiah, the word of the Lord was addressed to me, saying,

‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
before you came to birth I consecrated you;
I have appointed you as prophet to the nations.
So now brace yourself for action.
Stand up and tell them
all I command you.
Do not be dismayed at their presence,
or in their presence I will make you dismayed.
I, for my part, today will make you
into a fortified city,
a pillar of iron,
and a wall of bronze
to confront all this land:
the kings of Judah, its princes,
its priests and the country people.
They will fight against you
but shall not overcome you,
for I am with you to deliver you –
it is the Lord who speaks.’

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 70:1-6. 15. 17. R. v.15

(R.) I will sing of your salvation.

Second Reading

1 Cor 12:31 – 13:13

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians

There are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.

Be ambitious for the higher gifts. And I am going to show you a way that is better than any of them.

If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever.

Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people’s sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes.

Love does not come to an end. But if there are gifts of prophecy, the time will come when they must fail; or the gift of languages, it will not continue for ever; and knowledge – for this, too, the time will come when it must fail. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect; but once perfection comes, all imperfect things will disappear. When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and think like a child, and argue like a child, but now I am a man, all childish ways are put behind me. Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known.

In short, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.

Gospel Acclamation

Lk 4:18

Alleluia, alleluia!

The Lord sent me to bring Good News to the poor
and freedom to prisoners.

Alleluia!

Gospel

Lk 4:21-30

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Jesus, like Elijah and Elisha, was not sent only to the Jews.

Jesus began to speak in the synagogue, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.

They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself" and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside."' And he went on, 'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country.

'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.'

When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

Reflection

This week's gospel reading continues the story of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth. Luke introduces here the theme of fulfillment of Scripture, a theme that pervades this gospel: Jesus' ministry continues the work that God has done in Israel. At first, he is universally accepted: the people of Nazareth marvel at the gracious words he utters. They identify him as Joseph's son. By the end of the story, however, these same people actually try to kill him. So, what happens in between to cause such a dramatic change of heart? These are religious people, not an unruly street mob. They are friends of the family. They are familiar with the sacred texts and traditions of Israel and presumably want to understand them more fully. In fact, they are like many of us who take time out on a weekly basis to come together for worship and prayer.

The people of Nazareth seem to be carrying a sense of exclusive entitlement to God's favour, as well as some deeply entrenched prejudices against the neighbouring Syrians and Phoenicians. Their history is largely one of conflict with neighbours, of struggle for survival, and some are unwilling to relinquish their unhealed local and ethnic grievances. This story is about power and control. When Jesus suggests that God's prophetic and healing power is accessible to

and may even be more readily received among foreigners than within Israel, the anger of those who consider themselves “the chosen” knows no bounds: it spills over into violence. They have little patience with the implicit criticism of their attitudes to outsiders and the challenge of Jesus’ prophetic words.

One of the problems with the narrative is that Jesus seems to be deliberately provoking a negative reaction. There are other problems as well: there is no cliff in Nazareth from which the enraged crowd could cast him to his death, and it is highly unlikely that people of this tiny town of two to four hundred Galilean Jews would resort to murdering one of their own for what they see as a verbal assault. What is going on then? It would seem that the gospel writer is putting elements of later stories about the violent treatment of Jesus and his followers into this episode in order to foreshadow what is to come.

The story thus becomes a microcosm of the gospel as a whole. When the message is comforting, the messenger is well received. When it is less palatable, the messenger is in danger of being attacked or manipulated, more often than not at the hands of people who are basically good people like us. Unchecked assumptions, deep-seated biases, and uncontrolled emotions will function to bring the anointed prophet of the God of Israel to a violent death. This story invites us to check our assumptions and our biases lest we turn to physical, verbal, or emotional violence in the face of a prophetic challenge.