

Jesus - The 'Backyard' Prophet
January 30, 2022, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Luke 4:21-30
Fr. John

Isn't it interesting that within the same gospel reading, the crowd that was listening to Jesus preach in the synagogue in Nazareth with amazement and admiration would then suddenly turn into an angry lynch mob. The reasons for such a dramatic turn of events might also reflect something in our own attitudes which we need to examine.

The first inkling of this change of attitude would stem from the fact that he [Jesus] was a local boy - raised in Nazareth. He and his family were well known by his townspeople. The common and everyday character of the family would evoke a sense of surprise when a native son, someone who was raised in their own backyard should suddenly rise in prominence beyond the borders of their town. It evokes the bias that we all sometimes entertain that anyone locally raised can't become someone special on the world's stage. Rather than a sense of local pride, it can elicit envy, jealousy, and rather some small-minded thinking.

Jesus then reads the thoughts of the expectations which he senses in the crowd: 'Do here some of the miracles we have heard you have done in other places.' In other words, we want you to live up to **OUR** expectations. They didn't realize that the miracles done in other places often took place in the context of faith. That was obviously not the case here. The people wanted a 'show'. Perhaps in many instances that's what we desire from Jesus when we want an instant response from him in our prayer and a result that **we** want.

A third factor is that God doesn't necessarily favour those who feel entitled. Jesus pointed out that in the past it was often outsiders who received God's blessings and therefore the people of Nazareth should not feel that they should have the 'inside track' on Jesus ministry. Sometimes we in the church have to plead guilty to the fact that we think we have **all** the truth and others have little or none. This kind of arrogance has provided much trouble to the Church over the centuries. As Christianity spread throughout the world, it was often brought by the sword of colonizing nations that ran roughshod over Indigenous cultures.

So these, among other factors, created the 'perfect storm' in the minds of the 'good citizens' of Nazareth and they attempted to do what unruly mobs usually do - settle everything through violence. And as in the case of many of the prophets of the Old Testament - prophets like Jeremiah, Jesus was about to become the victim of that violence. A violence - not carried out by some foreign, pagan entity, but by good 'synagogue-attending' Jews. And although he would escape on this occasion, members of his own religious tradition - the high priests, scribes, and pharisees would eventually have him nailed to a cross.

Religion is an interesting thing. On the one hand, it can bring a true sense of hope, inner peace, and a sense of love for one's fellow human beings resulting in actions of compassion and true justice. On the other hand, it can be hijacked and twisted in order to perpetuate the most heinous of crimes perpetrated by those who claim the moral high ground and who try to justify their actions using their religious beliefs as the motivator and weapon.

St. Paul in our second reading today - a reading we often hear at wedding ceremonies, speaks about the nature and qualities of love. However, he cautions us that even if we carry out all the external elements that are identified with faith, but do so without love, we gain nothing. And furthermore, we may even create the mistrust and cynicism that may turn others away from a relationship with God.

Perhaps, what Paul says can be summed up by another Old Testament prophet, Micah, who stated: 'You have already been told what is right and what Yahweh God wants of you. Only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.' [Micah 6:8]