

## DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 30, 2022

What happens in Vegas . . . stays in Vegas. I think the people of Nazareth wanted to say: what happens in Nazareth stays in Nazareth.

Our first readings for several Sundays are from the prophets, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, so let's talk about prophets. In the First Reading we get some indication of what a prophet's life was like: God tells Jeremiah ". . . *stand up and tell them all that I command you.*" "*They will fight against you but not prevail . . .*"

Speaking the words of God was not easy, but Jeremiah humbly accepted his call although he did complain to God about the difficulty in being a prophet to the people of Judah: "*Let my persecutors be confounded—not me! let them be terrified—not me!*" "*All day long I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.*"

Many prophets were treated very harshly – some were killed. We don't know what happened to Jeremiah, but we do know what happened to Jesus – whom many considered to be a prophet.

So what was it that Jesus said that made his hometown mad?

If you remember last week's Gospel, news about Jesus had been spreading in the region. When he returned to his hometown Nazareth he went to the synagogue as was the sabbath custom, he was handed the scroll to read - it was from Isaiah. "*The Lord has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free . . .*"

Our Gospel today picks up where Jesus left off last week: "*Today this Scripture passage is being fulfilled in your midst.*" People were amazed, "*Isn't this the son of Joseph?*" People were impressed. If Jesus would have stopped there, everything would be fine. But Jesus continued, here's what I was thinking I will do: Recall the prophets Elijah and Elisha. They were popular prophets because of

their larger than life stories of raised the dead and how they fed the multitudes. But instead of retelling those popular stories, Jesus cited stories of Scriptures of a dark and difficult time in Israelite history when their ancestors were less than faithful people. Jesus recalled the story of Elijah who visits a widow in Zarephath – beyond the borders of Israel - and finds an outstanding example of hospitality and faith not found in Israel. And Elisha, healing the leprosy of Naaman - the Syrian - of all people!

Jesus! This is the Scripture passage that you are going to fulfill? And to the brow of the hill we go.

*“No prophet is accepted in his own native place.”*

Who are our modern day prophets and how do we treat them?

My best example of a recent prophet is Martin Luther King. Using the example of biblical prophets, Dr. King believed that God used him as an instrument to speak God’s word – the truth. . . and like the people in Nazareth, Dr. King said things people didn’t want to hear. Dr King was killed far too early because of the words he spoke. Sadly, the words of Dr. King still anger people today.

Where do we listen for prophetic voices? I hope that it’s not Fox News, CNN or Facebook. Maybe prophetic voices include Pope Francis, the Dalhi Lama, the recently deceased Desmond Tutu and maybe ministers of the gospel? To hear a prophetic voice takes research, patience, an open mind. And when those prophetic words make us feel uncomfortable, that isn’t the time to hit the delete key. That’s the time for reflection and prayer – and not to go to the brow of the hill.