

4th Sunday- C Deacon Pat Hall

JER 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 COR 12:31—13:13; LK 4:21-30

In our Gospel today we hear the rest of the story we began last week of Jesus in his hometown synagogue proclaiming Scripture from the prophet, Isaiah.

Jesus had spoken Isaiah's words beginning with:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has **anointed** me to bring glad tidings to the poor."*

The messianic tone of this anointing would have been unmistakable to Jesus' fellow Jews including his family members and extended family present.

We hear him today concluding the proclamation from Isaiah saying:

"Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

This would sound presumptuous if anyone else were to be saying this, but this is Jesus, whom we've come to know as the Son of God.

And while his hearers in that synagogue, so long ago, may not have understood his divine nature, it appears that they were initially happy about his messianic claim.

He was their hometown boy, the son of Joseph, the carpenter.

Why wouldn't his village and extended family benefit from their relationship with their "boy made good"?

This presumption of Jesus' messianic claim reminds me of C.S. Lewis and his famous quote about the matter:

*"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."*ⁱ

But it appears the Jews of Jesus' home initially received Jesus' messianic claim as something hopeful for them, their family and their village. Then the crowd suddenly became ugly with fury.

What happened?

Jesus had just spoken of the prophetic and healing missions of Elijah and Elisha to the Gentiles... To the Gentiles?

What was that about?

What about Jesus' own village, his own people?

And it was inferred that if they were to follow Jesus themselves, they would also have to minister to the Gentiles.

We may not fully appreciate from our 21st century lens the loathing and disgust Jews back then had for the Gentiles of the day.

They were sinful.

They were non-observant of the Law.

They were unclean.

But we today are all too familiar with the nature of judgmentalism and self-righteousness.

Rudyard Kipling wrote of his own people,

*"All the people like us are We,
And everyone else is They."ⁱⁱ*

We and they: how are we ... "We" today?
And how is that different from "Them"?

We make "Them" other than "Us" every day.

If I am white and he is black, does that make him one of Them?

If I am Catholic and she is Protestant, does that prevent her from being one of us?

What about the chronic unemployed, the homeless, and the AIDS sufferers... and the list can go on and on.

This sounds like I'm headed towards the oft-maligned naiveté of universal love, like Rodney King said at the LA riots,

"Please, we can get along here. We all can get along"ⁱⁱⁱ

People say “Don’t be so innocent.
There are real people out there who want us dead.”

Yes, I know. I’ve seen them.
As a police officer, I’ve been shot at.
I’ve had many a grappling match with not-so-nice people.
Everyday for 26 years prior to starting my shift I would align the sights of my
weapon and make sure that it functioned properly.
I was prepared every day to effectively exercise incapacitating force should I
be compelled to do so in the hope that some innocent life might be saved.

The Church teaches the responsibility each of us has for self-defense, the
defense of others and the defense of our nation.

The “love everybody” I hear us being called to is not to be done with closed
eyes.
As they say in hockey: keep your head up in the corners.

But, how do I judge others, make them part of “Them” and not of “Us”?
It helps when I try to look at them through Jesus’ eyes.
You see, Jesus would say, “You all are mine.”

So, what if a woman of middle-eastern descent were to walk into church
wearing a hijab and seated herself quietly in the back?
Could I get past my culture’s conditioning and accept her as Jesus would,
calling her his own?

While I hope I could rise to the occasion and be a better me,
I think I better come to his altar a few more times... prayerfully...
to receive the grace... **to love as Jesus loves.**

ⁱ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6979-i-am-trying-here-to-prevent-anyone-saying-the-really>

ⁱⁱ Joseph Pollard, *Fresh Light* p. 77

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Rodney_King