

Homily. 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.C. 2/3 February 2019.

St. Luke's story of Jesus' visit to His hometown synagogue in Nazareth turns out to be a snapshot of the entire gospel. Announcing the immediacy of the Good News, He was initially praised for the wonderful words that fell from His lips, though as we heard last weekend a few had questions about Him right from the start. Then, as we've listened here, Jesus went on to challenge the complacency, assumptions and privilege of His listeners. They thought that they were special, having a private monopoly over God's interest and concern. When Jesus reached back into the history and stories of God's action, stories they knew well but had conveniently skipped, their attitude changed mercurially to violence. They became enraged, hustling Him out of Nazareth in order to throw Him to His death. Easily imagining the melee that ensued at the cliffside, Luke tells us that Jesus quietly made His escape from their rabid clutches.

Yes, the whole gospel story is here in a bite-sized portion; proclamation of the Good News of God, praise from the people with a few early doubters, the spread of God's Divine embrace to include all people of faith and good will, the rage of the powerful threatened in their status and privilege and the sheep-like compliance of the mob leading to death, and then His great and calm resurrection escape as the new dawn broke.

St. Luke wants us to understand that God's work of salvation in Jesus is for all people who will listen, receive and trust, and that this is too much for some to accept, especially those invested in their own importance.

The widow of Zarephath in Sidon visited by Elijah wasn't living in Israel, nor were she and her son Jewish. Yet, it was to them that the Prophet was sent in the great drought and with them that survival and salvation were found. Ditto for Naaman the leper. He was a General of the King and army of Syria. God helped him through Elisha's words and instructions. Even though he was a foreigner he came to believe in the One True God, being healed and saved from his isolation and disease.

It was these two examples of the sovereignty, freedom and graciousness of God for all that so angered the Nazareth crowd. They understood from these quoted stories that Jesus was announcing a universal, a truly catholic message of saving grace. No longer could they have God and a special claim over God all to themselves. If there's one thing that's guaranteed to drive those who think they are special and unique to madness it's the realisation that they are just ordinary and human, as needy and dependent on God's love and concern as the rest of us.

In Romans 2:11 St. Paul writes that God has no favourites. He says this because true love has no favourites, sacrificing itself for the good of all. This is what Jesus did and why it is that Paul says that everything else will one day fail through imperfection except love, the greatest gift that endures forever. Jesus came to announce, bring and begin for us God's reign of perfect love, ending the drought, isolation and disease of our souls. He paid everything for this to come to pass, escaping death, rising up and living forever. This is our faith, the Good-News of God for all. We are proud to profess and live this faith through Jesus Christ our Lord.