

Homily. 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. C. 29/30 January 2022.

Everything will be fine if you tell people what they want to hear. Where it gets a bit tricky is when you give people what they need, which is exactly what Jesus did and found out at Nazareth. Talking about giving sight to the blind, setting captives free and beginning of the Lord's year of favour initially won favour with His home crowd. As St. Luke puts it; They all spoke well of Him, amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips.

This didn't last. Soon enough questions began to arise about how the son of Joseph the carpenter had come by such knowledge and power? Some began to think that He was getting above His station in life, a bit too big for His local boy boots. They wanted Jesus, their man, to do miracles for them on demand like those that they'd heard He'd worked 50 kilometres away, down hill by the lakeshore in Capernaum. That's what they wanted, but Jesus was playing. He wasn't going to put on a miracles on demand show for them like some circus act. He knew that what they needed was deeper faith in God and respect for Gods sovereignty to act as God chose. Hence, the telling of the 2 stories, well known, about Gods miracle working through the Prophets Elijah and his protege Elisha. In each of these stories God chose to help people in need who were not usually expected to be recipients of God's mercy; a Sidonian widow and a Syrian leper, pagans both, but people with faith and trust in Gods nevertheless.

What Nazareth wanted was God in their pocket, God turned on at their beck and call, God at the level of their local doctor and fixer-upper.

What they needed, and what Jesus gave to them, was a lesson in the truth, a lesson in humility and a lesson about what faith in God really is.

The result, which if it wasn't so sad would be laughable, was a 180

degree swing in their mood, from appreciation and amazement to anger, outrage and murderous intent. St. Luke ends by telling us that the entire Nazareth appearance turned itself into a circus, a hubbub, a melee so distraught and confusing that Jesus was able to quietly slip away from them all, never to return home again.

Some say that this scene is a summary of the entire gospel story, a thought that I like. It's all started off well enough with people flocking to hear Jesus and be healed. Then, when Jesus spoke and acted courageously and truthfully, rocking a few of their sacred boats in the process, followers begin to drop away. Ultimately, plans and schemes to get rid of Him fermented ending in His betrayal and death, the bonds of which He quietly and surprisingly escaped early on Easter morning.

But, what matters most here to you and me is that we get to hear and understand what we need. God isn't in anyone's pocket. God is God, always free to do just as God chooses. Our attitudes must be those of trusting, humble faith, with an eye open to the surprising ways in which God acts and what these actions reveal to us about Gods and about ourselves. The other point is that we are commissioned to give people what's needed, not just what they think they want. Truth is always what's most needed for it opposes the Evil One who is full of lies, spin and distortion. In Jesus Spirit and grace we, too, are to speak the truth with courage, living and giving God's truth with love, which is, as St. Paul reminds us, is the greatest gift and the only one that lasts forever.