

Jeremiah's call – if he had known that God was calling him to be a priest/pastor, he may have been more inclined to accept God's call. But no, God is calling Jeremiah to be a prophet. And do you know what people generally think of prophets? Jeremiah is a smart kid to tell God, "Thanks for thinking of me, but on second thought, really, you should try somebody else first." When I first received the call to ministry, my thoughts were definitely about how to fulfill the role of pastor and priest. If I had known 15 years ago that being a prophet was part of the mix, I may have ran the other way.

In Luke's gospel text for today, Jesus wastes no time demonstrating that one of his primary roles is prophet, and the people respond as they usually do to prophetic witness. The synagogue services in those days were rather informal: prayers were given, scripture was read; a teacher gave comments and alms for the poor were received. People might wander in and out, children laugh outside the door. The synagogue was like a neighborhood center, there was often a school and a place for administering justice. The community gathered there for most of its social and spiritual needs. Jesus, was at home here, among friends and relatives he had known most all his life.

Jesus preached his first sermon in his "home church" at Nazareth. The people of Nazareth had been hearing reports of the great things Jesus was doing in Capernaum. This hero was returning home to Nazareth. And if any city needed some good preaching, it was Nazareth. If anyone could turn the city around, it was Jesus. There were pagans all around. Phoenicians lived to the north, Samaritans to the south, Greeks to the west. They were surrounded by these pagan influences, far away from Jerusalem. It was hard to be a good, pious Jew in Nazareth. It's no wonder that Nathaniel said to Philip, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth.*" Nazareth was not a good place for a Jew to grow up. Jesus will help run out all the ungodly people. Maybe Jesus can make Nazareth a decent place to live.

When he stands to speak, everyone stops to listen. When he reads Isaiah's words, he promises to speak out for marginalized people and encourages his followers to do the same. "*Then he began to say, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'*" Initially, the crowd's response is enthusiastic as they marveled, at least for the moment. "*All spoke well of him. The people were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. Isn't it amazing, that one of our very own boys, Joseph's son, could be so impressive? And doesn't he know his Bible!*" They remember him as one of their own, and they are proud of him. Jesus is a hometown boy, and, therefore, special favors for Nazareth are expected. In terms of middle-eastern 1st century mores, a person had an obligation first to their family and then to their hometown.

This is a text that shows how quickly the honeymoon is over for the new preacher. The warm reception lasts all of 2 verses. Jesus doesn't seem to be basking in the glow of their admiration. Does he feel their expectations upon him? Does he feel that they've missed the point? Things take a turn as Jesus continues to teach. Jesus says the wrong things for this crowd.

He comments on why he is not working miracles among them as he did in Capernaum, a non-Jewish city. He implies that they lack faith, and that "*no prophet is accepted in their hometown.*" Jesus recalls a story from Elijah's time: how God miraculously provided food for a poor, pagan widow. There were many poor, starving widows in Israel during the famine who didn't receive any miraculous food. He goes on to talk about how God miraculously cured Naaman, a pagan leper. There were many sick lepers in Israel during that time who received no miraculous cure.

At hearing these words, the people who embraced him are now enraged. They are angry at him quoting their own scriptures in a manner that condemns them. The crowd starts mumbling: Why is he using those examples? Is he saying that God likes Gentiles better than Jews? Jesus had better watch what he says. He should be warning us to stay away from Gentiles. He's going to destroy what little faith is left in Nazareth. He just wasn't what they expected. He didn't do the miracles they expected. He didn't say the words they expected. Therefore, he had to be a false prophet. The punishment for false prophecy is death. Their feelings turn to rage. The people drive Jesus out of town, and lead him to the top of a cliff from which they plan to throw him.

Why did Jesus' words produce such anger? What made them so angry that they wanted to kill Jesus... their hometown hero? What is it about hearing this prophecy, that provoked them so much? When we probe a little closer, we see that at the core, he was challenging their notion and understanding of God. More particularly, their position in God's plan. They were in! They were the chosen - which means others were out! They were in to the exclusion of others. They had the corner on what God wanted and expected. And, frankly, they didn't have to "do" anything. They were born into it. You see they were content with being the chosen. Let's face it, Nazareth didn't have a lot going for it, but it was Jewish, and their identity was tied to being the chosen selected ones of God. They were special, they were entitled to a relationship with God and a very specific one at that. They may be lower on the totem pole, but at least they weren't as bad as the Gentiles. The non Jews --- who God must despise.

So, Jesus goes on to challenge their perceptions of him. He was one of them, he had been coming to synagogue regularly, always been part of it. We know that Jesus has a way of dividing people. He was always making people mad. Couldn't he just go along to get along...really? He sees himself as prophet, a truth teller. He knows that what he is about to do and say will not put him in favor. In fact it will put him in good company with Elijah and Elisha ...and with Jeremiah. Jeremiah, where the role of the prophet is to pluck up, tear down and to plant!

Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah in a round about way. They couldn't go there. There is always a reaction to prophecy/"truth". Truth either evokes or provokes a reaction. Truth can make us uncomfortable. Discomfort-Challenges our perceptions and expectations. Think about a truth that is shared with you that you may not agree with. Something is shaken at a core , some fundamental mindset. Sometimes there is awareness, most time not.

Barbara Brown Taylor says that we should expect to be challenged and upset by the truth, by the "people sent to yank our chains and upset our equilibrium so we do not confuse our own ideas about God with God." We don't like "being told that our enemies are God's friends. No matter how hard we try, we cannot seem to get God to respect our boundaries. God keeps plowing right through them, inviting us to follow or get out of the way" You know it isn't too different for us today. Jesus enters into our lives and awakens us to Truth! He asks for us to shift our understanding of God, of him, of each other.

Leonard Pitts – Seattle Times Univ Chicago – People tend to create God in their own image, to ascribe to the deity their own opinions, interests and beliefs. But is that really faith, when you reduce God to a bigger version of you???

Are we making God into our own image and miss who he really is; How do we, like the Nazarenes have an image of God, (and who God cares for) that needs to be challenged by the Truth of Jesus?

Do we have a specific way that we think God should be working? It's hard not to. Does God's love extend to people who watch Keith Oberman? Or does God's love extend to people who watch Glen Beck?

Our knowledge of God stays the same and that is faith. NO! God is the same and our knowledge of God changes and grows. Power of Truth - What is it about hearing the Truth that makes us react so strongly .. "The truth will make you free, but first it will make you miserable. "Often, God give s us a wake up call ... How do we know what the wake up call is... Usually there is discomfort involved, a challenge to our view of how life should be ... a challenge to our notion of how we want things to be. Something that makes us feel uncomfortable, something the suggests a change in how we act, how we think, something that challenges us at the core. The wake up call brings us to a consciousness.. it gets our attention .. How does that happen... well for most of us... we are so deeply asleep spiritually that it is usually something that make us uncomfortable ..

For Nazareth it was a challenge of their notion of God and a challenge of the image of Jesus ... Then we react ... WE can react in a number of ways... We have a choice, do we act like the Nazarenes, and "shoot the messenger" in our discomfort by blaming someone else, looking externally? For other s who encountered Jesus ...there was a response of openness inward.. . what does that mean... which leads to wholeness, healing ..a shift, a transformation !!!!

Do we step back, reflect, ask the Truth to come in and shine a healing light? We all have struggles and blind spots in our journey w/ God. The key is noticing those wake up calls, following the discomfort/frustration/ anger down and determining how we will react? Will we shoot the messenger or will we open ourselves up to receive healing?

Jesus' church followed Jesus like a fan follows a sports team. They liked the image of him, notion that he was from Nazareth, that he was famous -- they probably thought, would it be great to have him come and be a guest rabbi like a Rotarian finds a speaker for a luncheon. They didn't really want to experience Jesus, that would mean change!

Close: If you are feeling discomfort in these words I have shared -GOOD!  
Embrace it, welcome it, invite God to take you deeper into your discipleship and path of wholeness.

We get to awaken to God's Truth and LOVE and in the process become more like Jesus. God calls us, on a path that may get us into trouble but impels toward an expansive, generous, justice seeking vision of the world? What would it look like for Jesus' first sermon with Isaiah's text to be fulfilled this day? Might it, inspire compassionate, overflowing aid to Haiti that is accompanied by our own hunger to understand better why a country, a people, suffers so much, and a deep commitment toward transforming that suffering into a new and better way of life? Would such commitments take us out to cliffs we would rather not face? How large is your view of God's nature, how wide is your understanding of God's embrace, how deep is your sense of the movement of God? Will we run from such a love, and such a call, or will we seek it with all our heart, and let it take us out to the edges, where risk, and hope, and courage all lie?