

“Jesus Must Die, But It Is Not Yet His Time”

Luke 4:16-30

Jesus preaches a sermon in Nazareth. These are the first recorded words of His public ministry. There in the synagogue, He reads from the book of Isaiah that He had come to preach the Good News and that He was going to free mankind from the prison of sin. And He says, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

And “All spoke well of Him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth.” “Isn’t this Joseph’s son? Why, I remember Him when He was ‘this’ tall.” They appreciate His “gracious words”, but it becomes clear that Jesus is not the Messiah that they want. They try and throw Him off a cliff.

In the words Christ read from the prophet Isaiah, we hear the greatest of messages – the forgiveness of sin. God will rescue His people. But this is not the Messiah that they want. The meaning and the brilliance of this message is there for the hearing. And the Epiphany, the revelation of who Christ is and how He is to be understood from the Old Testament is further revealed in Jesus’ words that He spoke when He had finished reading. And in the subsequent reaction by the listeners, we clearly see He is not the Messiah that they want.

Jesus comes proclaiming the Good News of forgiveness for Jew and Gentile alike...and liberty [freedom] for the captives – those who are captive to sin. There is no possible better message that could be heard. But the crowd has come to see some miracles. Jesus' fame had been spreading. The people of Nazareth know about miracles done in Capernaum, and Jesus knows of their desire to see such things. Demands for miracles were always rejected by our Lord, because such demands represent a misunderstanding of the miracle's function.

Christ's prophetic office, that is, Jesus showing Himself as a prophet through proclamation of the Word and the performing of miracles, is not meant for the people's entertainment or curiosity. And like the prophets of the Old Testament, like Elijah and Elisha who Jesus mentions, when God sends His messenger to the people of Israel, those who should be rejoicing at the words being proclaimed, attempt to cause harm instead. This was the case for all the prophets.

And certainly "No prophet is acceptable in his hometown." And what we see in Nazareth is a small-scale version of what is to come during Holy Week in Jerusalem. The people are amazed at what they hear about Him; are amazed at His gracious words; yet they reject Him outright and would like to get rid of Him for good.

This, of course, is what we find in our society today. Nothing has changed. The vast majority express appreciation for Christ's gracious words. He gets quoted all the time – even in secular settings. But how few there are who yield their own desires and opinions to the truth of God's Word. For the majority, Jesus and His words are only acceptable so long as

He doesn't say anything of real consequence and He remains the syrupy sweet Messiah they want Him to be.

Even among the faithful, there are far too many times in a person's life when we speak or act in such a way that we clearly do not want Jesus in the area – or we speak or act in such a way that we imagine He is not around to hear or see us. Otherwise, we would be speaking or acting in a very different way.

Isaiah prophesied of the coming Christ: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" [Is. 53:3]. That is the Old Testament reading for Good Friday.

During this Epiphany Season, we have seen a series of revelations concerning who Christ is. As the Wise Men saw His star and came to Herod's palace seeking Him, we saw the reaction of Herod – "This King must die." But it was not His time. We have witnessed His Baptism, the wedding at Cana, and now His first recorded sermon followed by the foreshadowing of the rejection that is to come. He was to be "stricken, smitten, and afflicted"; "pierced for our transgressions... and crushed for our iniquities." Also from the Old Testament reading for Good Friday from the prophet Isaiah.

This King must die. The crowd in Nazareth tried to throw Him off a cliff. But it was not yet His time to die. That day will come, but good news and freedom must first be preached. Even though Jesus came preaching the forgiveness of sins, rescue for His people, the words of salvation that they needed to hear, He was not the Messiah they wanted.

Unfortunately, even in the lives of God's people, our Lord is often despised and rejected...and we esteem Him not as we should. Time with your Lord is viewed as an inconvenience or a chore that has to be done. Like the people of Nazareth, sometimes we aren't happy with our Lord because He is not the Messiah we want. Our human nature wants God to make our life easy. Our human nature wants God to answer our prayer according to our time and our will.

Christ came to preach the good news and proclaim freedom from the prison of sin. Freedom from sin means death has no hold on you. When we hear those words and truly wrestle with what that means – nothing else matters.

This doesn't mean we should stop praying for all the other wants and needs for our body and life. He came to teach us to pray and teach us to pray "Thy will be done" and mean it. He came to teach us the will of God. The words of Christ, and Isaiah, and Elijah, and Elisha, and the words spoken here at Our Redeemer are words of life and hope and salvation – because these words are the Word of God. They mold and shape our will to be in accordance with the will of our Father in heaven.

We don't come to Him with the hope of changing His mind, and then threaten to, figuratively speaking, throw Him off the cliff, if He doesn't do or say what our human nature wants to hear.

Christ is not necessarily the Messiah that our human nature wants. But He is the Messiah we need. He came to preach the Good News of salvation and set you free from the prison of sin. In this Good News we have life. Honestly, nothing else really matters. Amen.