

The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany—

St. Luke 4:21-30

February 3rd, 2019

St. George's Bolton

Fr. Chris

## **Hearing the Truth**

“All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.”

Last Week, as you may remember, we heard about the early travels of Jesus and his visit back to his hometown of Nazareth where he grew up. Then Jesus visits the local Synagogue where he read from the Isaiah scroll, and he proclaims the prophecy fulfilled. Shocked and caught completely off guard, the religious leaders of Nazareth and some of his former neighbors want to run him out of town, proving the saying, "A prophet is not welcome in his hometown." How can it be that this man, with whom we are familiar, who we watched grow up, the son of Mary and Joseph, and the brother to his siblings, some maybe still living there, how can it be that this man could begin to claim that he is the fulfillment of the prophesies spoken of in the Isaiah scroll? This is ludicrous and unbelievable! What hubris!

For one thing, familiarity breeds contempt. When we think we know everything about someone or something, we become more casual with them, we begin to get comfortable about the way we see them. We see someone in a movie or in a TV series, and we think that they must be a nice person because they are always playing the role of a nice person. Sometimes the converse is also true. Sometimes an actor who always plays a villain may in real life be a kind and gentle person. In actuality, sometimes the truth may be wholly opposite. We assume we know them by what we have seen, and we forget that they are merely acting a role. The better the actor, the more believable this may be. This is also true with holy places and holy people, the more familiar we become with them, the more they lose that quality of otherness and holiness for us. It is a process of bringing them down to our size and level, rather than continuing to aspire to theirs.

This was never more true than it is today. When we have heroes among us, we seek to knock them off their pedestals, because something tells us that they are human like us, and we cannot believe their heroism to be really true. So we look for ways to get more familiar and find their faults, which everyone has, rather than celebrate their achievements or good qualities. Remember Captain Sully Sullenberger? Have you seen the movie starring Tom Hanks, which tells the story of his heroism? One of the first things that happened after the rescue was that the investigators and airlines tried to blame him for the accident! ‘Get out of town Jesus, we don’t want you around here anymore if you are going to pretend to be some prophet or someone special or better than us. We can’t believe that.’ ...So what can’t we believe?

A prophet speaks truth to all of us. A prophet speaks truth to power, no matter the risk to themselves. A prophet invites us to change society and calls attention to where we are headed if we don’t change. A prophet invites us to change individually, to change any harmful behaviors we may have, to grow and to improve our lives and our world around us. A prophet helps us to see we can make a difference as individuals and that we need not worry about how small we think that difference is: picking up one piece of trash, greeting one lonely person each day can make the world we live in a better place. You’d be surprised the difference it makes!

But prophets are often not heard either because we don’t want to listen, or are not listening to what they are saying or they are not welcome in our circles or we simply refuse to believe them and find excuses and reasons not to do so. If you think about it, we often try to attack the character of every prophet, to invalidate the difficult message they are speaking to us, which we don’t want to hear. In fact real prophets are so feared by those who wish to maintain the status quo or fear their message, that they are often martyred. Consider Mahatma Gandhi and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., among a long line of others who were run out of town and killed. John the Baptist and Jesus would be distinguished in this way also.

Real prophecy is not welcome and it is difficult to hear above the din of false prophets! What prophetic voices, if any, are speaking in this moment, in our time? Have you heard any? The messenger will distinguish themselves from false prophets by their character and calling. They will not do it to be self-serving, in fact, the act of being such a prophet will be self-risking. They will not be seeking power or position money or rewards for speaking the truth. Gandhi and King lived simply in what others would call poverty and gave away their monetary rewards to help others. Gandhi lived in a tiny hut and wove mats and ate simple meals. King

lived in a house in the same poor Atlanta ghetto neighborhoods as the people who came to his church. He gave away his Nobel Peace Prize money and all of his book royalties to the civil rights cause and other charities. No McMansions or fancy cars for these folks. They were worried that they and their message would be unwelcome to some. They tried to keep on telling the truth, despite the challenges and frustrations that they were not being heard. But they know in their hearts that truth needs to be heard and that truth will always win out over lies and falsehoods.

So far we have been talking about the messengers. Now let us consider the message.

Consider that we often do not listen to the words of the prophets who speak in our own day and choose to listen only to the truth we desire the truth to be, rather than the truth that is. Do we welcome the truth in our lives, or do we set up barriers to it? We fear the truth because we may fear it will judge us or our behaviors. Our personal truth can sometimes be discovered through journaling. Red threads of truth may appear about our lives or our past choices that demand to be addressed. Sometimes a good friend will fearlessly speak a truth to us in a gentle way so that it may be heard. Another way to get help hearing the truth about yourself is to go to a therapist. I have done so several times in my life, and have gone kicking and screaming. Yet here was a way for a modern prophetic voice to speak truth to me, to polish the mirror for me so I could see myself in truth, and not what I wanted to believe about myself. This is also a speaking of truth to power, a powerful line of defense that does not wish to let the truth in, for whatever reason. The modern prophet certainly personally helped me to hear truths I did not want to hear, or truths of which I was afraid. The truth will set you free, and it did so for me.

The Truth may be disturbing as it portends to shake up the status quo. We don't want to hear it. We don't want to believe it. Sometimes it is unbelievably good and sometimes it is unbelievably bad. Jesus is the truth and the life and the way. This is a profoundly good truth. Don't be too quick to avoid the messenger or the message, and prepare to welcome the prophet into your hometown and into your life. You will be happy you did. AMEN