

4th Sunday of Year C

At the beginning of the Gospel story today Jesus *wins the approval of all* – they are *astonished at the gracious words that come from his lips*.

At the end of this text we are told that everybody was enraged, sprang to their feet, and hustled Jesus out of town with the intention of throwing him down the cliff.

Clearly there has been a change in the attitude of Jesus' audience to what he has to say!

But that change did not happen on one and the same occasion – it took place gradually as what Jesus had to say became more and more challenging to those who heard him.

St Luke is summarising a process which took place over weeks and months, and which he will describe in more detail in the several chapters of his Gospel that are to follow.

We recall that Jesus begins his ministry by speaking of God's love for the poor, the downtrodden, the blind, those who are imprisoned. This is a message that surely conveys the compassion of God and is **comforting** to hear.

But as Jesus begins to make reference to the many prophets sent by God whose call for justice and mercy was spurned, and who were treated badly for what they had said, his listeners become increasingly uneasy.

It begins to dawn upon them that the blind people he is referring to are not so much the beggars by the wayside - who might engender sympathy by their miserable plight - but those who do not see anything wrong with their way of living, who do not see what God is asking of them.

They begin to realise that Jesus is calling for a change in attitude and action on the part of many - all who had become self-satisfied and set in their ways.

When Jesus declares that God's love and favours are not limited to a particular group of people, to a chosen few, but embrace those regarded as outsiders, he causes outrage. An elite community senses that their status is being questioned, and way of life is being criticised.

They feel threatened and, rising up in self-defence, seek to get rid of the one who is **challenging** their accustomed way of life.

But this is the task of a true prophet: **to prick consciences**. Prophets are not fortune-tellers. A prophet is more like the court jesters of old who, with clever - and sometimes risky – humour, criticised the ways of royalty.

Prophets do not foretell the future but help us to see the truth about the present. The words of a true prophet cut through lies and illusions. They make us reconsider everything.

And a true prophet will put forward an **alternative** way of life, one that is better for humanity - one that is more in keeping with the will of God. God surely sends prophets in every generation and to every place on earth.

Prophets today are crying out about many important issues:

- about the need to care better for our environment, to respect other creatures and sustain biodiversity; to avoid exhausting the limited resources of the planet;
- about the increasing gap between the rich and poor;
- about the need for greater justice in international trade;
- about the immoral profits which are made by exploiting the poor in sweatshops;
- about the escalation of conflict between groups of people that is the result of the irresponsible promotion of arms sales;
- about the need to ‘live more simply so that others may simply live’.

On the face of it these may seem to be secular issues, but they are profoundly religious: God created our world and we are entrusted with its stewardship; we are our brothers keeper; and, as the Gospel tells us, we will be judged on our practical concern for the needy. *I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me to drink, sick and imprisoned and you came to see me.*

God said to Jeremiah: *Brace yourself for action. Stand up and tell them all I command you, and do not be dismayed at their presence.*

What God says to Jeremiah God says today to us. We too are called to be prophets in our time and place.

Returning to Nazareth after his Baptism, Jesus felt compelled to act on his life’s calling.

We received our calling to be prophets at our Baptism.

What is God asking of us now? What action are we going to take?