

Text: [Luke 4:16-30](#)
Date: October 13, 2019
Title: “Jesus the Prophet: Not a Popularity Contest”
Theme: We are surprised and shocked by the people God uses to convey the divine message.

Intro

So, I don't know about you but over the past several weeks, I've been surprised by this series on Jesus the Prophet I've learned more about Jesus AND more about the prophets than I have in a long time
Sometimes it takes a little shift in perspective to see something you think you know well a bit differently

I've enjoyed writing the daily devotions, mainly because that work forced me to make connections and see the big picture
I encourage you to check those out – now available in the app, on [Facebook](#), and at our [website](#) Mon-Fri
I think they're going to be helpful to you

This week, we're wrapping up with one more surprising story from the gospels
About that time that Jesus preached in his hometown and people wanted to throw him off a cliff – do you recall that one?

1

Comics talk about it as either “killing” or “bombing”
Either they've got everyone rolling on the floor laughing, or there's nothing but a few polite pity laughs

Preachers aren't nearly as colorful in their terminology
But trust me, we know whether what we're saying is landing or not
I've preached before where people looked at me like I had two heads, where there might as well have been a brick wall between me and the congregation
And I've preached where it felt like everyone in the room was sharing one heart and one mind

Anyone who has to speak for a living – whether an attorney in court, a
teacher in front of a class, an salesperson making a pitch
Knows what I'm talking about

When things are working, it's beautiful
And when they're not, time seems to stretch on forever
There is nothing more uncomfortable

But I can't imagine any of us have never had an experience quite like
what's described in today's gospel
I hope you've never had anyone drag you out of the room and threaten to
throw you off a cliff!
(If you did, I definitely want to hear that story!)

2

What's even more bizarre about this is it happened in Jesus' hometown
Can you imagine? People who knew him his whole life wanted to kill him
(Maybe, though, some of you can identify with this?)

I keep trying to picture what Jesus' relationship with people in his
hometown of Nazareth must have been like
The gospels tell us that his family thought there was something wrong with
him – they thought he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21)
And in a small town – archeological studies suggest Nazareth was maybe
only about 150 people – it wouldn't have been at all surprising if
EVERYONE bought into that and shunned him

The town didn't have a great reputation – there's one place in John's
gospel where a potential disciple says:
"Nazareth – can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46)

You hear the questions people ask when they initially hear what Jesus is
saying: "Wait, is this really Joseph's son?"
They were surprised and amazed, not quite sure what to make of Jesus'
return

Nazareth is depicted in the gospels as a place of little faith
Mark flat out says, “Jesus could do no miracles there” (Mark 6:5) – because
the people didn’t believe
They couldn’t believe in this kid they knew his whole life!
And let’s be honest – if we’d been in their place, we would have had a hard
time believing too!

Here was this young man, whom many had probably talked about behind
his back, or maybe even to his face, sharing a powerful message
The there were all these rumors about miracles he was doing in
neighboring towns
He had made a name for himself
And now all of them could say was,
“Wow. I remember that kid. He was so strange. But look at him now!”

It reminds me of this story about the musician and actor Lady Gaga
During her first year at NYU, she was bullied by a group of people who
started a Facebook group called “Stefani Germonotta, you will never
be famous”
I have the sense that she’s not the only celebrity who had that experience
I’m sure these are some of the same people that come asking for
autographs later!¹

3

So when Jesus steps forward to read the scripture and preach
(At that time, apparently adult male who had been bar mitzvah’ed could
offer a lesson)
People are anxious to hear what this guy is going to say: “every eye was
fixed on him”
This is a very personal moment in Jesus’ life, and a revealing one

And he makes some bold choices
He reads from Isaiah 61:
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
To preach good news to the poor
Release to the prisoners
Recovery of sight to the blind
To liberate the oppressed
And to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor

And then he says:

“Today, these things are fulfilled”

In other words, they’re true *in me* – *because he was doing all those things*

Preaching to the poor, healing the blind, offering forgiveness to everyone

These were the things that only the Messiah could do

Now everyone is thinking: “The kid who used to eat Play-Doh in preschool says he’s the Messiah? Come on.”²

4

Still, though, people seem to be with Jesus, right up to that moment

The trouble comes when Jesus decides to push a little farther

Which is another risk of public speaking

You get to feeling pretty good, you’re comfortable, you’re confident, and you take things just a little bit farther than you should

Have you ever done that?

You begin to say EXACTLY what you’re really feeling

When that happens, watch out!

That’s what it seems like is going on here, maybe as Jesus remembers how people in Nazareth had treated him his whole life

I’m guessing he spent his early years being told: “Shut up, kid. God’s not speaking to you. Who do you think you are?”

And now these SAME people are hanging on everything he says, waiting to hear him speak a word from God

Oh, and he’s got one

“I’m sure you want me to do some miracles,” he says

“Like you heard I did in other places”

“But you and I both know no prophet is accepted in their hometown”

And then he tells two stories about prophets from Israel’s history –

Elijah and Elisha, two of the greatest prophets ever

Some of their most famous miracles weren’t even performed for Israelites at all, but foreigners

At times when kings had rejected the prophets – in Elijah’s case, when the king was hunting the prophets down to kill them
God went OUTSIDE the nation – to make God’s love visible beyond Israel’s borders
Because the people back home COULDN’T see it
Because they WOULDN’T see it

5

THIS was the thing that made the people of Nazareth SO crazy
That they were ready to throw Jesus off a cliff

He was putting himself in the same category as the greatest prophets of all time
This kid, whom everyone thought was out of his mind

The people of Nazareth couldn’t bear the idea that they had gotten things that WRONG
Because to hear him, to listen to him, to respect him NOW
Was to admit that every time they made fun of Jesus or laughed at him
They had been wrong

Wrong about the fact that God can speak to and through anyone
Even that kid who lives down the street
From the family you don’t like

When I read the prophets, one of the things I take away is that these are very ordinary people
The prophet Amos famously said, “I’m not a prophet nor a prophet’s son. I’m just a shepherd and a guy who takes care of fig trees. But the Lord said to me, go speak to my people Israel” (Amos 7:14-15)

The prophets are ordinary people whom God asks to deliver extraordinary messages
About how the people and the institutions of society have strayed from God’s path

These are messages that they often don't WANT to deliver
Because they know that in doing so, there's great risk to themselves
A risk that people may want to throw them off a cliff
But they do it anyway – because it's what God has called them to do
And what people NEED to hear

Let what happened to Jesus in Nazareth be a reminder to us:
God is still speaking, even today
Sometimes through the most unexpected people – sometimes even us!

Calling us to account for what we're getting wrong
What the nation, what the church is getting wrong
Will we dismiss them?
Will we drag them outside of town to the top of the cliff?
Or will we listen?

Amen.

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ

¹ Winona Ryder tells a story about being asked for an autograph by a woman who had beaten her up in 7th grade, all the while hurling homophobic slurs. The woman vaguely remembered beating someone up, but didn't remember that it was Ryder. Ryder of course remembered, and had a few choice words in response!

² It's a lot like the scene in Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*, where Brian's mom says, "He's not the Messiah! He's a very naughty boy!"