

4th Sunday (C)

- It's difficult to accept any prophet - someone who comes along with a new way of thinking or a radical idea which undermines our established & accepted way of thinking & behaving.
- But, if you think about it, often the greatest scientific breakthroughs & inventions have come about because a particular researcher is prepared to "think outside of the box" – it's the same with religion.
- The Old Testament Prophets were usually ignored or vilified by the religious establishment because they had a new perspective on God's love.
- We can't be following every new & passing trend otherwise we'd soon lose our precious held principles & reasons for justifying the things we do.
- But of course, the main difficulty is in discerning the true prophet from the false one - so we can easily understand how religious authorities instinctively reject all prophets – they always have, & always will because they throw into disarray what is established & accepted.
- Often trouble is caused not so much because prophets have ideas, but because they can't keep them to themselves.
- The problem is generally because the prophet can't keep quiet.
- As we heard last week, here in the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus speaks sublime words, quoting Isaiah & announcing that he is the Messiah.
- And all are amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.
- But it is when he goes on to suggest that he has come just as much for the Gentiles as for the Jews that things become awkward.
- They accept him at first but then he just goes too far - he crosses an invisible boundary.
- Their understanding of the role of Israel as the chosen people is that all others are excluded, but Jesus doesn't see it that way.
- Yes, the Jews are a chosen people & they certainly were chosen by God to bring the Messiah into the world but they weren't chosen to keep the Messiah to themselves.
- Once Jesus points out what they have conveniently forgotten, that the great prophets Elijah & Elisha also had a mission to the Gentiles, the crowd turns nasty.
- They can take his sublime words but they can't take his quoting their own history back at them—especially when it proves them wrong.
- The People of Israel had regarded themselves as a special group for so many centuries that they can't comprehend that God would love anyone else.
- They forgot all the times that they too had gone other ways; they failed to remember how they so frequently rejected authentic prophets sent by God.
- All they remember is that they are the chosen people & this is arrogance in the extreme.

- But Jesus is, & behaves like a prophet - he is not a priest of the Temple; he's not an official teacher of the Law.
- In contrast to kings & priests, a prophet isn't anointed by anyone; his authority comes from God who is bent on inspiring & guiding his people with his Spirit, when political & religious leaders don't know how to, because they've lost the way of true leadership.
- It's not accidental that Christians believe in a God incarnate in a prophet.
- The characteristics of a prophet are unmistakable - in an unjust society, where the powerful look for their own well-being & maintaining their authority while silencing the sufferings of those who are marginalised & unjustly treated, the prophet dares to read & live reality as seen through the compassion of God for the most miserable.
- A prophet's life becomes an alternative, irritating presence that criticises injustices & calls for conversion & change in living & in relationships.
- So, when religion itself comes to terms with an unjust situation & its interests no longer match those of God, the prophet upsets its indifference & self-delusion.
- He critiques the self-deception that threatens every religion which claims to be everlasting & absolute.
- The prophet reminds everyone that God alone saves & cares, even when his representatives don't.
- As a church based on the life of Jesus, the prophet, we must never ignore the prophetic dimension of Jesus & the prophetic mandate given to his followers. We worry about the lack of priests & we pray for vocations to priestly ministry - & that's fine, but we don't pray that God raise up prophets among us.
- We certainly need them - both for ourselves as communities of faith that we might read how God calls us to change, but also for us to be agents of change in our society so that we might be open to proclaim by our lives, the God of surprises.
- The Jewish people lost sight of the reason why they were chosen by God - He chose them in order to bring the Messiah, into the world.
- He set them apart so that he could teach them about what kind of a God he is - He made them a holy people, a favoured nation, suitable soil in which his Son could be planted - they were to be a prophetic people to the world - their favoured status was so that they could be of service to the rest of humanity.
- Let our prayer be that we may truly be prophets to the nations, but also where we live & let us pray that we will be effective in communicating the love & compassion of God as members of Christ's prophetic followers to those around us forgotten & excluded by the establishment of nation or church.