

February 3, 2019

Jer 1:4-5,17-19; 1 Cor 13:4-13; LK 4:21-30

We can have a hard time accepting what we don't want to hear. We like it when people agree with us, we like it when people complement us, we like it when people come to our defense no matter how right or wrong we are - in fact the heck with who is actually right. In fact, we can sometimes be more concerned with winning in a conflict than with truth, or peace, or love. The readings today point to an important lesson of Jesus - that of engaging with one another in truth, peace, and love - and this is very important for us as a Christian community towards each other, and also in our relationship with Jesus himself.

So let's look at two ends of this situation - us as the receiver of truth, and us as giver and supporter of truth. In the Gospel we see an example of how we humans typically act. As long as what Jesus said was not offensive to his listeners, they were accepting - we hear: *And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.* What he was saying was a bit out there (claiming that he was fulfilling a prophecy of Isaiah), but they were just taken in and were listening. He was speaking the truth, and they could admit that his words were amazing and they listened openly trying to understand what he was saying. There are many things that can happen to us as listeners that close us to what someone is saying - whether it is true or not. We see an example of two of these in the Gospel story:

First, they begin to judge the messenger and not the message itself. They knew Jesus since he was a boy (this was his hometown) and they say: *"Isn't this the son of Joseph?"* In other words, "isn't this the kid from up the street"? They begin to fall into a trap that we all can fall into - not looking at the message itself, but judging the value of the message based upon who said it. I once heard a story about a truck that got stuck under a bridge, it was too tall and it got wedged underneath. The highway Department came, the police came, many adult of various occupations weighed in on it, engineers were present - no one could figure how to get the thing out of there. Then a young boy in a car yelled out that they should let air out of the tires so it would be able to get out. That was the solution - even if it came from the kid up the street and not the trained engineers - the message has its own value, good or bad, regardless of who says it.

The second thing that can close us to a message is to reject the message because it is not what we want to hear. There are many examples from our religions and from history of people

who rejected the right idea because they didn't want that to be the answer. In the Gospel story the people doubt him because of who he is, but they only try to kill him when he says something they don't want to hear. Something is not true just because we like how it sounds - some things are true whether we like them or not. One of the great signs of Christian maturity is to be able to realize that another person who we don't like, and who said something we don't want to hear, is really telling the truth - and then remain open to what they are saying and treat them with love.

God sends us messages through others, through life situations, through or reading and study that we may or may not like to hear. But these are always done with love. God wishes for us to become in the fullest way the person God made us to be, a person in God's image and likeness, a person with faults but is loved by God. We heard in our first reading: *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you* - God knows us best and God's only motive for challenging us is to bring us up. Willingness to admit that what we are hearing may not be what we want to hear but might be what we need to hear, and responding to that message even if it means making a change - this is cooperating with God and allowing God to guide us. Trust and cooperation with this guidance deepens our relationship with Jesus.

But if God uses others to speak to us, does God use us to speak truth to others. Yes. But we need to pray and be open to the fact that we may, or may not, be right in that we think we should say. When we know we must address a brother or sister it must be with the same motive God has when addressing us. It must be with the motive of love and for the benefit of the other not to give them a good "I told ya so"! Before the passage we heard today in the second reading Paul says: *If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal*. Whether we are right or wrong if we don't do it in love then we are not an instrument in God's hand surgically helping to heal another we are a hammer with potential to wound. We hear Paul tell us of the right attitude: *[Love] is not jealous, it is not ... rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth*. Whether that is the truth that is being spoken to us that we have to remain open to, or the truth that we must speak in love to another to help them grow - truth, peace, and love must be the goal. The truth, spoken to bring peace, delivered in love. If we can receive truth openly from God and not be defensive; and if we can be the instrument of God working in truth, peace and love - we will allow God to bring us to a better place in our lives, and help others do the same.