



THE REJECTED PROPHET

[Daniel J. Harrington](#) January 15, 2007

Today's selection from Luke's Gospel continues the narrative begun last Sunday. The setting is the synagogue at Nazareth. Jesus has read passages from the book of Isaiah concerning the anointed prophet of God and declared that "today" this passage was being fulfilled in him. The second part of the narrative continues the theme of prophetic succession raised in the first part, and adds two important elements to Luke's programmatic preface to Jesus' public ministry: prophets often suffer opposition from their own people (the rejected prophet), and Jesus stands in the tradition of the prophets Elijah and Elisha (who ministered to non-Jews also).

According to Luke, Jesus is the prophet of God par excellence. The Holy Spirit dwells in him and acts through him. Yet the reception given to Jesus by the people of his home area turns from initial curiosity and mild enthusiasm to hostility and violence. The problem may well have been the people's feeling that Jesus was not doing enough healings and other miracles in Nazareth. They may have wanted to keep Jesus for themselves and benefit more from his powers.

As the reading from Jeremiah 1 shows, prophets are seldom popular. Prophets tell hard truths and make people confront unpleasant realities. Prophets do not hire pollsters or commission focus groups. Their power and authority come from God, not from popular opinion. It is generally true that real prophets seldom find acceptance among their own. This proverb was true of Jeremiah in Jerusalem and of Jesus in Nazareth.

Jesus also stands in line with the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Their prophetic ministries prefigured the prophetic ministry of Jesus in many respects. Those two prophets from the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. taught through parables and symbolic actions, healed the sick and restored dead persons to life, and they suffered rejection and persecution for proclaiming God's will and judgment. Moreover, as Jesus' two examples from 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 5 show, Elijah and Elisha worked miracles for persons from outside their home areas and even outside the boundaries of Israel. Their ministry to non-Jews prefigures the spread of the Gospel outside the land of Israel, which is described by Luke in his Acts of the Apostles.

Paul's celebration of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most beautiful and inspiring passages in the Bible. The original context for Paul's instruction about love was a young Christian community divided within itself and bickering about spiritual gifts. In that context Paul insisted that love is the most important spiritual gift and that all such gifts must be practiced in love. He also affirmed that genuine love sincerely seeks the good of others and is something that we give more than something we are entitled to receive. And Paul promises that when all our achievements and possessions pass away, love will abide in our eternal life with God as the greatest gift of all.