

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany, February 3, 2019.**

Our lessons today remind me of tough conversations between parents and children.

Here's the scene from today's gospel (**Luke 4:21-30**). It is not Jesus as an infant in a manger. It is rather Jesus as an adult speaking in a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. And his message is not what his listeners were hoping for. Like many generations before them, they were waiting for the Messiah. And there were pretty strong indications that this Jesus, their very own, might be that Savior.

But on this day, after listening to Jesus, they were not happy. He was not saying what they wanted to hear, which was that he would do for them what he had done for those in Capernaum. Instead he was citing episodes about God performing acts of mercy on those who were Gentiles, not Israelites. A widow in Sidon and a leper from Syria.

"What about us?" they said. When do we receive your acts of mercy? We raised you. You're one of ours. Surely if you have power to help people, you will help your own. To which Jesus responds "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown." Another way of saying to the people, "I'm different. My interests go beyond."

At this point, disappointment turns to anger. "When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage." And they ran him out of town.

You and I have been part of such conversations. Maybe when we announced to our parents that we were going to do something that we knew would disappoint them. Or maybe when we as parents were asked to sit down to listen to a child announce a decision which the child knew would disappoint us.

One of the toughest things to do as a parent is accept a decision by a son or daughter that is other than what we had hoped. We don't run them out of town, but our disappointment is clear. Yet, we deal with it. We recognize that it is not

our life to live and that we need to honor a difficult choice that our loved-one has made.

Maybe it was this morning's lesson from Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 1:4-10**) that gave the child the courage to talk to mom and dad. "Ah, Lord God! truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." Here is the Lord's answer: "Do not say, 'I am only a boy,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you."

**Psalms 71**, which Jesus had learned as a boy, applies here. "In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; let me never be ashamed ... For you are my hope, O Lord God, my confidence since I was young."

One of the qualities of Jesus that we admire is his courage in the face of really tough decisions. As children expressing independence, we would like to have such courage. And, as parents reminding children to think carefully about what they are about to do, we would like to have such courage as well.

Scripture helps in this regard. It reminds us and encourages us to be strong in the face of tough decisions. This morning's passage from First Corinthians (**I Corinthians 13:1-13**) is an example. Jesus calls us to make decisions based on love. Is there a better description of love in all of literature than this passage? I don't think so. And I think this is by design.

To offer love and to accept love is hard work, and that too is by design. This is why this passage is often read at weddings. Cheap love, shallow love, purely selfish love, naïve love is not what we are called to expect or exercise. Indeed it is not love at all, according to St. Paul: Rather, "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude."

For parent and child, this is a very high bar to clear, even with really good intentions. And, when we don't clear it, for whatever reason, isn't it comforting that we have another chance? And we do have other chances, don't we? There is forgiveness, which we can share with one another, and there is Salvation, which only God provides, for the asking and the accepting.

Imagine a world without our ability to forgive one another and God's decision to save. It's not a pretty sight. It's a world without freedom. If there is no forgiveness and no salvation, we are subject to our weakness. We are captive.

And so we pray in our Collect this morning, "In our time grant us thy peace." We don't pray for perfection. We pray for God's Peace, the true source of freedom.

We don't get to this level of faith quickly or easily. Paul tells the Corinthians that before we see the Lord face to face, we look in a mirror dimly. You and I know what it's like to look in a mirror dimly. First thing in the morning after some questionable decisions the night before. Things are a little fuzzy. It takes some time to focus, at which point we utter something like "Oh my God."

This is not a prayer, but maybe it should be. Our choice at this point is crawling back to bed, or splashing water and greeting a new day. At our best, we are splashers, not crawlers.

Our Lord was a splasher. His signature greeting of a new day is called the Resurrection. And it can be our experience too. We're here, mindful of two things: that there will be times when we fail to do God's Will, but also that our weakness doesn't carry the day. God's love is stronger. Not the shallow love that we sometimes exhibit, but the deep love of One who simply won't let us go.

The more we can appreciate this Divine commitment, the more lovingly we can navigate those tough conversations that children need to have with parents and that parents need to have with children. All of us have God on our side, but God's presence is only as effective as our welcome. This truth needs to be part of the conversations too.

One of the blessings offered to newlyweds applies to parents and children: "Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace."

Wish it were so. Pray that it be so. And do what we need to do to make it so. God is always doing His part. And there's always a role for us as well. Amen.

