

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Intro

“Who is this guy? Where did he get all this?”

“Who does he think he is? He’s Joseph and Mary’s boy.

- “We’ve known him since he was this high.”

“Boy, what a Messiah complex.”

Jesus’ friends and neighbors aren’t very happy with him—so much for the “Hometown Boy makes good” headlines.

What’s going on? Why are they so upset?

What caused this reaction?

First we read, “And all spoke well of him” —and the next thing we see is that people are trying to throw Jesus off a cliff.

To find out—we have to go back to last week’s Gospel, when Jesus returned to his hometown synagogue and read from the Prophet Isaiah.

## I. Jesus’ Job Description

A. When Jesus began his public ministry; He read these words from the Prophet Isaiah:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)*

1. And then he sat down to teach.

2. And they all leaned forward expectantly—wanting to hear what this hometown kid had to say.

3. And he says, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

4. “Hmm,” they all said, “ah, very deep—very spiritual.”

- And they nodded their heads in agreement.

5. The Gospel even says, “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.”

B. But Jesus knew right away that they had missed the point.

1. The people nodded and smiled, unwilling to allow the radical truth of his words to sink in.

2. So, he made it plain.

3. He told them that prophets are always rejected at home,  
- and that sometimes foreigners are more understanding and faithful than the people of God.

4. The smiles slowly faded away.

- Pride turned to rage.

5. Now the words of Jesus no longer seemed so gracious and admirable.

6. The idea that God is present to ALL the poor and oppressed, regardless of their ancestral ties to Abraham so enraged the people of Nazareth that they now sought to kill Jesus by driving him out of town and throwing him off a cliff.

7. They had their own preconceived ideas of how God was to act, and any challenge to these closely held beliefs shook them to the core.

8. They were NOT ready and COULD NOT hear these radical new ideas that Jesus was putting forth.

9. They knew how God would act, and no upstart kid was going to change that.

C. And so, Jesus left his hometown, never to return again, and took his message to the seaside town of Capernaum.

1. And there, the Gospel tells us, they were **ASTOUNDED** at his teaching, because he spoke with authority.

2. And what was it that he taught in Capernaum so successfully?

3. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)*

4. And that these words applied to EVERYBODY—and God’s love and God’s kingdom were available to everyone.

5. These words became Jesus’ **core message** for the rest of his ministry as he works to fulfill them;

- to preach the good news, to set the captive free, and to give sight and **insight** to those who are physically and **spiritually** blind, and thus to proclaim the year of the Lord.

6. And, as I said last week, these words become the **Job Description** for his followers too—from his first Disciples down to **US** today.

- For we, too, are called to bring the good news of God’s love and God’s kingdom to everyone.

## II. Two Fears

A. So, what is it that stops us—what keeps us from following through and living out Jesus’ job description?

1. It’s two things—two FEARS really:

- Fear that we won’t know what to do or what to say—and
- Fear that we might make someone angry or uncomfortable.

2. Well, Jesus takes care of that second fear in today’s Gospel.

3. Jesus certainly doesn’t worry about making people annoyed—he gets them so mad that they are ready to throw him off a cliff.

4. If you think about it, Jesus is always making people irritated and doing things that the “GOOD” people don’t think he should be doing.

5. He eats with tax collectors and sinners.

- He heals on the Sabbath.

- And in today's Gospel, he says that non-Jews have a place in God's kingdom too.

6. Jesus is always getting into trouble.

7. Perhaps the worst thing to ever happen to Christianity is that it became **respectable**.

8. All these people trying to outdo one another at being pious and holy—looking down their noses at others and saying,

- "Well, **I** wouldn't do something like that."

9. And over the years, we Episcopalians have been the worst.

10. Jesus is always pushing the envelope and making "good" people feel uncomfortable—shouldn't we?

11. Jesus is always reaching out to the poor—the Outcast—the marginalized—the socially unacceptable—shouldn't we?

12. A friend of mine says we should "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

13. So go ahead—rock the boat a little bit—and as you do, remember the **TURTLE**—he only moves forward when he sticks his neck out.

B. And what about that other fear—the fear of not knowing what to do, or what to say?

1. That was Jeremiah's fear in our OT lesson.

- When God calls him, he responds, "I'm too young—I won't know what to say."

2. We use that same excuse all the time, don't we?

- "I don't know enough Bible."

- "I don't know enough about Christianity."

- "I wouldn't know what to say."

3. I will resist the shameless plug for the Confirmation/Inquirer's Class and simply say that God says that excuse doesn't work anymore.

4. God says to Jeremiah, “You shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.”

5. God says, “Don’t be afraid, I am with you”—and God says the same thing to us.

6. God says that he will be with us and tell us what to say and what to do, just like God told Jeremiah.

### III. Moving Forward

A. The other day, this quote appeared on Facebook from the Spiritual Writer Richard Rohr:

- *“Jesus tried to change people by loving and healing them. His harshest words of judgement were reserved for those who perpetuated systems of inequality and oppression and who, through religion itself, thought they were sinless and untouchable.”* [REPEAT]

1. How are we going to respond to Jesus and his Job Description?

2. Will we be like the people of Nazareth and try to jettison Jesus from our lives and thoughts—or worse yet, simply ignore him?

3. Or will we say, “I will with God’s help,” and strive to live out Jesus’ Job Description here and now with all those we come into contact with—as individuals and as a parish?

B. But to do this is going to take all of us to roll up our sleeves and work together to make Jesus’ Job Description a reality here and now.

1. We need to be known in our community—we need to be at the top of someone’s thoughts when they think about a church.

2. We need to be known as an open place, a loving place, an accepting place.

3. A place that truly reaches out *to bring good news to the poor*; to bring *recovery of sight* to those blinded by their own hatred and fear; to proclaim God’s amazing inclusive extravagant love is available to EVERYONE, and to share it with everyone.

4. And we need to be a place where people can be in contact with God in a real and tangible way.

C. And to do all that, we need to do three things.

1. **First**, we need to be here—whether in person or via livestream.

2. We need to make a conscious effort to be in touch with God and to check in with one another.

3. **Second**, we need to continue to be open and inviting to others—as the pandemic eases in the coming months, people will be looking for ways to reconnect, and this is the perfect place for that—they just need an invitation from YOU.

4. People are going to come here because this is a place where they are fed spiritually and can connect with God.

5. And **finally** and most importantly, we need to pray.

6. We need to pray for St. Columba's: we need to pray for our leadership, pray for our parish family, that we can be a place where people can know God and God's love for them.

7. And, as Saint Paul reminds us in our New Testament lesson, we need to do all this with LOVE.

D. To do all this will take work and energy and determination.

1. It will also require a willingness to try new things and accept new people and new ways of doing things.

2. And it will take time—it won't be done overnight, but I know we can get it done.

3. All of us need to jump in and start pulling in the same direction so that we can be the place that God calls us to be and be the people that God calls us to be.

## Conclusion

One of my heroes, **John Phillip Newell**, tells a story of a three-day retreat at a new monastic community led by a wise elderly monk who was there to guide the participants in the essentials of community life.

On the first day, the old monk shuffled into the room, sat down, and said to them, “Today I have just one thing to say to you. God loves you. Now go away and think about that.”

So off they went in their discipline of silence for the day, walking in the monastic gardens and reflecting in their individual cells on the great mystery of God’s love.

On the second morning, the old monk again shuffled into the room, sat down and said, “Today I have just one thing to say to you. You can love God. Now go away and think about that.”

So off they wandered for their second day of silence, pondering the great truth that God not only loves us but longs for *our* love.

- Not only are we recipients of love,
- we are the beloved partners in an eternal love affair.

On the third morning, the participants wondered: *What could possibly be next after the essential teachings of the first two days?*

- God loves us, and we can love God.
- Was there anything left to add to this completeness?

The old monk again shuffled into the room, sat down, and said to them, “Today I have just one thing to say to you. You are to love one another. Now go away and live this truth as a community.

- This is the pearl of great price, living together in love.”

This is the key for us, too—to live together in this great triangle of love: God’s love for us, our love for God, and our love for each other.

This is what we are called as the Community of St. Columba’s to LIVE OUT and to SHARE.

And it is my fervent prayer that, with God’s help, we will make this so.

Let us Pray

God of all mercy,  
Your Son brought good news to the despairing,  
Freedom to the oppressed  
And joy to the sad;  
Fill us with your Spirit,  
That the people of our day may see in us his likeness  
And glorify your name,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

(New Zealand p. 564)