

Called by God

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.** Here ends our text.

It's not a good thing to reject Jesus. Because when a person rejects Jesus, he's rejecting God. Furthermore, it's not a good thing when a person rejects one of Jesus' disciples. Because when a person rejects one of Jesus's disciples, he's also rejecting Jesus and thereby rejecting God. And to reject the true God is to lose his blessings in this life and receive his condemnation in the next. But that's what we see in our Gospel reading today. A family, a hometown, and a nation all rejecting Jesus and his disciples and thereby rejecting God.

It wasn't good for Jesus' family. The last time Jesus was home he gathered such a crowd that his family went to seize him because they thought he was out of his mind. His own brothers didn't believe in him and rejected him as the Messiah.

It wasn't good for Jesus' hometown. This trip home, Jesus is teaching the Word of God in the synagogue, and his disciples are with him. But many from his hometown questioned his credentials, authority, and power. **“Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?”** Jesus didn't go to the seminary in Jerusalem. He's not a rabbi. He's a carpenter! Like the Pharisees, they may have thought he did such mighty works by the power of the devil. They know Jesus is the son of Mary and they mention his brothers and sisters, but they don't mention his father, perhaps because they believed his birth to be illegitimate. They took offense at Jesus, rejected him, and downright blasphemed him. Jesus marveled at their unbelief, and he could do no mighty work there except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. Jesus lamented, **“A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”** It wasn't looking good for Jesus' hometown or family.

It also wasn't good for the towns of Israel. Jesus sent out his disciples two by two to preach to the Jewish nation, village by village. Jesus said to them, **“If any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” “Whoever rejects you, rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.” “Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”** It wasn't looking good for the Jewish nation.

But it also wasn't looking good for Jesus. His own people spurned him, mocked him, spit on him, flogged him, condemned him, and sent him off to be crucified and killed. And his disciples were treated no better. The apostles whom Jesus sent were flogged, imprisoned, crucified, and beheaded. Being a prophet seems just as bad, maybe worse, than those who rejected the prophet.

And what about today? How many men have told their relatives that they hoped to go to seminary and enter the holy ministry? How many times do their own families tell them that they're out of their mind and discourage them? Or how many pastors have had their wives leave them because of their work in the Church? Or had their own children rebel against their teaching and leave the church in unbelief? A pastor today is often without honor among his own relatives and in his own household. It doesn't look good for pastors.

And what about me? I'm a prophet in my hometown in my home congregation. When I stand up to preach or teach, do members here ask, “Where did this man get these things? We remember his parents, Kenny and Nadine. We remember when he was a little kid in church and Sunday school. We know all his sins. Isn't he an engineer? How can he do mighty works in our church, baptize babies, consecrate the Lord's Supper, forgive the sins of the penitent, or withhold forgiveness from the impenitent?” Jesus said, **“A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown.”** It doesn't look good for me.

And what about our church? We've had quite a bit of turnover in the pastoral ministry in the last 50 years. Pastors who resigned, pastors who took another call, pastors who left after a short stay. Did we call the wrong guys? Have we rejected them and thereby rejected Jesus? It doesn't look good for our church.

And what about our nation? People used to think of the United States as a Christian nation, founded on Christian morals and values. But today the Christian Church here is mocked, ridiculed, and persecuted. God's law and Christian morality are rejected. God's name is profaned, and Jesus is blasphemed by false teaching and evil living. It doesn't look good for our nation.

But you know what is good? Despite our rejection of God, God the Father still called and sent his Son Jesus to be our Savior. Though his family, hometown, and nation rejected Jesus, God still called Jesus to be their prophet. God called his Son before creation, sent him into the world as man when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and ordained him as prophet at his baptism. Though his hometown questioned his credentials and even his paternity, Jesus has the credentials of being the Son of God the Father, who testified, **“This is my beloved Son.”** Though they questioned his

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authority, Jesus said, **“For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.”** Who better to speak as a prophet than the Son of God who’s been given wisdom from God to speak. And though Jesus was rejected by his people, crucified, and killed, his suffering and death as the Son of God was God’s means of redeeming all the world. On the cross Jesus took God’s condemnation for us, and from the cross flow all of God’s blessings for us in this life and the next. Even better, Jesus is never limited from doing mighty works by people’s lack of faith. No one had faith that Jesus would rise from the dead, and yet in his resurrection, Jesus performed the mightiest work of all. Which means that Jesus isn’t a dead prophet or our prophet from long ago, but Jesus is our living prophet who still speaks to us today.

How does Jesus still speak to us today as our prophet? When Jesus still walked this earth, he called his disciples and sent them out as his apostles. They were called by God. What credentials did they have? None of them went to the seminary in Jerusalem either. Like Jesus, they were second career guys who were fishermen or tax collectors. But they received their three years of training directly from Jesus. That’s the best seminary training of all. Jesus gave them power to perform mighty works, casting out demons and healing the sick. But the mightiest works of all which Jesus gave them was his authority to preach and teach, baptize and forgive sins. Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told his disciples, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** The apostles went forth with God’s call and commission, power and authority, to bring the Gospel and Sacraments to both Jew and Gentile. Many in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and finally the known world heard the good news of salvation. They didn’t reject Jesus, but by the power of the Holy Spirit working a mighty deed in their hearts, they received the message of the Gospel. They received Jesus who came to them as their prophet through the words and acts of the apostles.

And that’s still true today. Jesus is ascended into heaven to the position of power and authority at the right hand of God. But he still speaks to us as our prophet by calling his disciples and sending them out as pastors and missionaries to speak his words. The only difference is that Jesus doesn’t call his disciples directly like he did with the apostles. That’s an immediate call. Today, Jesus calls through means. It’s a mediated call. Jesus calls through the means of his Church. And though the means might be imperfect because the Church is made up of imperfect people, and though the men called may be imperfect because they’re sinners too, pastors are still called by God with Christ’s authority to speak his words and do mighty works in his name. Today, God calls through the means of his Church, and he speaks through the means of his called pastors.

And so it doesn’t matter if a pastor’s relatives criticize him. He’s not called by his family; he’s called by God. Though he might be dishonored, he’s not called by his hometown; he’s called by God. And just because Jesus said a prophet is dishonored in his hometown, it doesn’t mean he shouldn’t be a pastor there. In fact, in the early church, before there were seminaries, the local church always called a local guy. After a missionary planted a church and before he moved on, the church raised up one of their own men whom they knew to be qualified. For the most part, pastors were all hometown boys. So, I don’t worry about serving in my home church in my hometown. You know all my sins, and I know all of yours. I’m here to forgive those sins. Not by my own power and authority, but because I’m called by God to do so. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but Christ who called and sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. It’s good to be here. In fact, it’s great to be here and serve those who raised me in the faith.

And as a church, we shouldn’t worry that in the past or future we might make a mistake in whom we call as pastor, because God is the one calling them. He’s choosing the right man at the right time. We’re just his means of doing so, imperfect though we are. We haven’t rejected the prophet, because unlike the town of Nazareth, Trinity Darmstadt hasn’t rejected Jesus. Jesus continues to do mighty works in our church. He calls pastors, but through them he also called you by the Gospel. Jesus baptized you and washed away your imperfections. You confess your sins, and Jesus absolves you. Miraculously, Jesus gives you his own body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper for your forgiveness. The pastor isn’t doing these mighty works; Jesus is. And Jesus isn’t limited from doing these mighty works at our church because of the lack of faith. We receive all these blessings through the faith which he creates and sustains in us through these mighty acts, his Word and Sacraments, his means of grace.

This is all good. It’s good that pastors are called by God to be his prophets. It’s good that you’ve been called by God to be his disciple. It’s good that our church has received Jesus and received his prophet. It’s good that Jesus does mighty works in our church through his means. And it’s good that through those means God receives us into his family, his Church on earth, and his home in heaven. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.