

**Fourth Sunday of the Year  
January 28, 2007  
By Father Charles Bowes**

**Jeremiah 1:4-5  
Psalm 71:1-6, 15-17  
1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13  
Luke 4:21-30**

## *God's word both heals and challenges.*

It is hard to hear stuff that upsets us. But how have we reacted when someone challenged our behavior? Or criticized our behavior?

Did we calmly and politely say, "Thank you for setting me straight?" Did we immediately commit ourselves to change our behavior? I know I don't. I'm usually defensive and cautious.

In years gone by I would at times ask myself, "If I lived in Jesus' home town, would I respond any better or any different than his neighbors?"

How many times have we thought to ourselves: "If I had lived in Jesus' day, I would have responded to him a whole lot better than the Pharisees did?" Or: "If I had heard the prophets' warning, I would have changed my ways and avoided the catastrophes that we read about?" Wouldn't it be wonderful if that were true...that we really would behave significantly different (better) than "them?"

The folks who heard Jesus had an attitude of exclusiveness, a sense that "We have a right to God's favor"...and "Jesus has no business hobnobbing with those non-Jews in nearby Capernaum." 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. And they wanted to be reinforced in that. They knew their

faith, and God help the one of their own kindred who suggested otherwise or implied another way of viewing life and God - that God could actually have a heart for folks beyond me and my town. Heaven forbid that God could be inclusive.

The folks of Jesus' hometown really are no different than any other group of people. We like to think that we have God all figured out, supposing that we can create God in our image. We can become comfortable and complacent, demanding that others see God the same way we do, maybe even threatening expulsion if they don't mouth the words we think they should say, even if their heart isn't in it.

Commitment to one way of living, believing, doing makes us vulnerable. If our "only way" is questioned or comes into doubt, we're in big trouble. Our world turns upside down. The moorings of meaning no longer hold, and if the doubt deals with religion and seems even remotely plausible, the very thing that sustains us through thick and thin becomes suspect...and we can despair, become depressed, aimless.

The point of these readings is to challenge us to face our response to the Word of God. Like the people of the Old and the New Testament periods, we want the "Word of God" to be comfortable, unchallenging and supporting. We want to come to church and be made to feel good. We want to be able to go home feeling totally justified in what we think and say and

do. The truth is, we need to be challenged no less than the people who heard Jeremiah or Jesus. We need to hear that there is always room for growth and that complacency kills our spirits. We need to take Saint Paul's words to the Corinthians to heart and "put on love", which surpasses every other virtue.

As the saying goes: The gospel is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. The "Word of God" isn't always an easy word to hear. Nor is the "Word of God" always easy to speak to others.

Let us pray: Protect me from making a false peace, God of the prophets. Make me patient and kind, but also a pillar of iron, a wall of brass against everything that stands in the way of your will - especially when your will is other than my own. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

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