

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible at the center of your group, and light a candle beside it.

SIDE 1: When I was a child, I talked like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put childish ways aside.

SIDE 2: Now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.

SIDE 1: Now we know only in part; then we will know fully even as we have been known.

SIDE 2: There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and love.

All: The greatest of these is love.

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus repeats in this Sunday’s gospel these words that climaxed his reading from the prophet Isaiah in last Sunday’s gospel. In this statement Jesus identifies himself as the prophet the Spirit anoints to bring good news to the poor. Jesus will inaugurate a jubilee era in which the poor and oppressed have a new chance to thrive. For Luke, this is Jesus’ vision for his mission.

Ansgar Holmberg, an artist and Sister of St. Joseph, thinks that visions of justice precede and foster action for justice.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

Her art envisions a world in which diverse people live in communion with one another and with Earth. Her work sees people in an interdependent web of life with all that lives in the cosmos. She believes that every person is an artist, capable of imagining what can be.

At the site of a Habitat for Humanity Blitz, I encountered an older couple who saw in the activity around them a vision of what humanity could be. Roberta and Walter Green lived in Benton Harbor, Michigan, during better economic times for the city. “In its glory days,” said Walter. Their son was directing this Habitat build, so they drove up from

Chattanooga, Tennessee, to be a part of it.

“We drove along this street last week,” Walter commented. “It was just concrete foundations.” He looked down the street now lined with houses fully framed and watched volunteers hammering siding into place and crews lifting rafters to waiting hands for roofs. “Could this be the precursor to peace, this experience of learning to work together?” Walter asked.

● What vision in art or in action gives you a sense of what our world and human community can be?



GOSPEL

Jesus' hometown folks cannot imagine he is the messiah.

NARRATOR: After reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah in his hometown synagogue, Jesus sat down and began to speak.

JESUS 1: Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

NARRATOR: All who were present spoke favorably of him; they marveled at the appealing discourse which came from his lips but also asked—

PEOPLE: Isn't this Joseph's son?

JESUS 2: You will doubtless quote me the proverb, "Physician, heal yourself," and say, "Do here in your own country the things we have heard you have done in Capernaum." But in fact, no prophet gains acceptance in his native place.

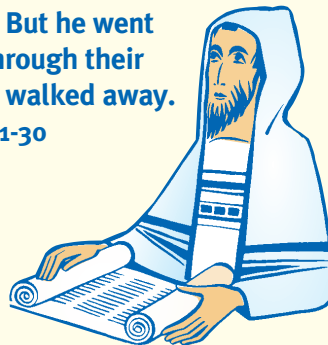
JESUS 1: Indeed, let me remind you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heavens remained closed for three

and a half years and a great famine spread over the land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but to a widow of Zarephath near Sidon.

JESUS 2: Recall, too, the many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one was cured except Naaman the Syrian.

NARRATOR: At these words the whole audience in the synagogue was filled with indignation. They rose up and expelled him from the town, leading him to the brow of the hill on which it was built, and intending to hurl him over the edge. But he went straight through their midst and walked away.

Luke 4.21-30



At first the people react with amazement and praise Jesus' interpretation of the scriptures. They seem to entertain Jesus' declaration that the words of the prophet can come alive. But quickly their certainties overtake their dreams and they begin to wonder how the local carpenter's son can possibly bring the world round right.

● What is a sermon that you try to live? Who gave it?

● What turns the hometown folks from marveling to indignation?

In last Sunday's gospel, Luke tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath as was his custom. Gathering to hear and interpret God's word is the way Jews continually build up their identity as God's people. The Word of God functions like a constitution. It creates a community that lives its story into the future.

Within the Sabbath assembly individuals become a people who share a common history and story that tells them who they are. Sabbath by Sabbath and generation by generation the word goes forth to bear fruit in people's lives and to create an ongoing community of mercy and justice.

On this Sabbath Jesus lays claim to a radically new and flourishing future by remembering Isaiah's ancient promise. Today, he says, is the day for looking at the world from God's point of

Jesus claims the future for human flourishing.

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." These words begin Jesus' inaugural address in Luke's gospel. In last Sunday's gospel Jesus reads a passage from Isaiah that describes a prophet whom the Spirit anoints to bring good news to the poor, freedom to captives, sight to the blind. This prophet will inaugurate a jubilee in which those who have lost out in society get a new chance to thrive. Jesus begins the

first major policy speech of his ministry by declaring he *is* that prophet.

Jesus invites the synagogue congregation to hear Isaiah's word not as an ancient, someday promise but as a present claim on their future. He, Jesus, is the Spirit-filled prophet anointed and appointed to make the human race a whole, flourishing community in which no one is left out.



view in which the poor and blind are as important as the rich and seeing.

The Sabbath is the day for resting in the goodness and connectedness of all that is. So it is on a Sabbath in the midst of his own people that Jesus proclaims the Spirit, the giver of life, will work through him to heal, forgive, set free, and lift people up.

● **What gospel words animate your community of faith? What words constitute its mission?**

The Sabbath sermon that begins with Isaiah's words of promise climaxes with Jesus' words of judgment. Jesus reminds his hometown listeners of two foreigners in Israel's history who accepted prophets that Israel rejected.

The widow of Zarephath in the region of Sidon north of Galilee is Jesus' first example of a believing Gentile. God sends Elijah to live with the widow to keep him safe and fed after he angers King Ahab and Queen Jezebel by proclaiming it will not rain again in Israel until God says so. The people have followed Jezebel in worshipping

Baal and forgotten who is really God in Israel.

The widow from Zarephath grumbles and even swears when Elijah turns up wanting food and water. She sees Elijah as a danger, as bringing the power of God too close for comfort. But she does what he asks and makes him, her son, and herself small cakes.

For three years after that her flour jar and oil jug never run out. His prophetic word proves true in her life. Jesus uses her faith to reproach his unbelieving hearers.

Jesus' second example of a believing Gentile is Namaan, a Syrian general who seeks out the prophet Elisha, Elijah's successor, to heal him of leprosy. Elisha commands the general to bathe seven times in the Jordan River. Namaan

objects that this is far too impersonal and humble a way for a person of his stature to be cured. But an aide convinces Naaman to try the prescribed cure. Elisha's prophetic word proves true. Jesus angers his audience with the example of Naaman's willingness to act on a word he doesn't fully trust.

Both the widow and Naaman struggle and wrestle with a prophet's words. They fear, challenge, and doubt the word, yet try it and find it true, nourishing, and healing.

● **With which of Jesus' prophetic words do you struggle and doubt?**

● **Which words call you to try them and let them prove themselves?**

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DO SOMETHING

● Women comprise half the world's population but hold only 1% of the world's wealth. Microlending projects often fund women's enterprises. See FINCA at villagebanking.org and CRS.org/microfinance.

Jeremiah suffers for the prophetic word he speaks.

Jeremiah is the Old Testament prophet most like Jesus. He speaks for God during one of the worst times in Jewish history—the last decades before the kingdom of Judah is destroyed. Jeremiah objects to God’s call to be a prophet, insisting that he is too young and doesn’t know what to say. When Jeremiah begins speaking as God’s prophet at age 22, the great reforming king Josiah reigns and listens to Jeremiah. The year is 628 B.C.

However, Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt vie for power in the Middle East, much as nations do today. As Babylon (think Iran) begins to take over the Assyrian empire (think Iraq), Josiah sees a chance to extend Israel’s boundaries. He dies in battle in 609; Jeremiah stands up against increasing opposition.

When the Babylonians conquer the Assyrians, Jeremiah preaches against making an alliance with the Egyptians to fight them. He smashes pots to demonstrate what will happen to Jerusalem. He wears a yoke to show what Babylon will do to the people.

The kings after Josiah and the people of Judah think the temple makes Jerusalem invincible. They see Jeremiah as a traitor for insisting God will remain with them “only if you reform your ways...deal justly with your neighbor, no longer oppress the resident alien, the orphan, and the widow.”

God calls Jeremiah.

In the days of Josiah
the word of the Holy One
came to me:

Before I formed you in the womb
I knew you; before you were born,
I dedicated you; I appointed you
a prophet to the nations.

Gird your loins, stand up, tell the
people all that I command you.
Do not break down before them,
or I will break you before them.
I, for my part, this day
have made you a fortified city,
a pillar of iron, a wall of brass
against the whole land:
against Judah’s kings and princes,
against its priests and people.

They will fight against you,
but they shall not prevail over you,
for I am with you, says God,
to deliver you.

Jeremiah 1.4-5, 17-19

- When have you experienced God’s call to speak as a prophet? What has your speaking cost you?
- Who speaks as a prophet against the wrongs of our time? What does it cost him or her?
- How do you judge whether to accept or reject the words of a prophet?

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PRAY

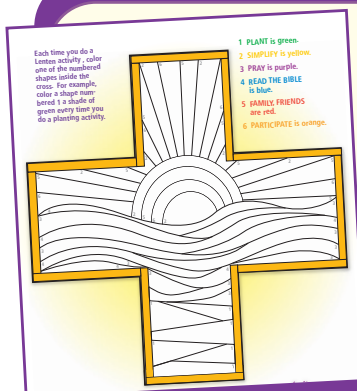
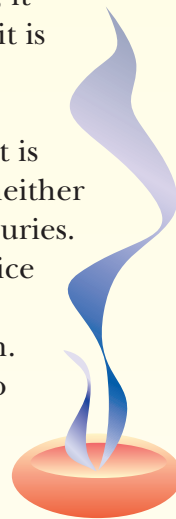
Identify a prophetic word you must speak or choose one of Jesus’ prophetic words on which you must act this week. Take turns having members of your group who wish state their commitments. Respond to each person’s statement:

ALL: This scripture will be fulfilled in our midst.

Each say a line in turn from Sunday’s second reading.

- 1: Love is patient.
- 2: Love is kind.
- 3: Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish.
- 4: Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger, neither does it brood over injuries.
- 5: Love does not rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices with the truth.
- 6: There is no limit to love’s forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

ALL: Love never ends.



Ash Wednesday is March 3
Be ready for Lent with family-friendly activities like this color-by-number cross. Go to goodgroundpress.com and click on the cross image to find activities to download and print.

GoodGroundPress.com