

*We bow our hearts in prayer:* Dear Jesus, lead us not into the temptation of contempt for You or hearing your gracious Word. Give us eyes to see You, freedom to praise You, and thankful hearts to gladly hear You and support Your work among us so that others may receive You and rejoice in You. Amen.

Jesus had begun His earthly ministry after His Baptism by St. John the Baptizer.

He had been preaching and performing miracles throughout Galilee and in Capernaum.

Among those that needed to hear the Gospel of forgiveness were those in His home town of Nazareth... and so He turns in there.

He was there for the Sabbath and, as was His custom, took His place among His brethren in the synagogue.

We shouldn't think that He was there because He was scheduled to preach, and so He had to be there. He wanted to be there.

He was there to hear God's Word and to respond with prayers of thanks and praise.

And while He was there, He stood up to read and preach, as was their custom.

We are told that in His reading and expounding, the people responded with **astonishment** and **marveled at His wisdom and gracious Words**.

Jesus read to them a portion of Isaiah's prophecy that speaks of the Anointed One, the Messiah, **opening blind eyes, proclaiming liberty to the captives, and setting free the oppressed**.

This was all well and good. They had heard these things before.

But then Jesus put the scroll away and with everyone's attention on Him said,

**"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."**

And here is where the tide begins to turn.

Their familiarity with Jesus and His family, bred contempt for Him and His gracious Word.

And so we enter into the fray hearing our Lord speak to them to turn their hearts.

*Our text for meditation today is...*

*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

---

And [Jesus] said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to Me this proverb, "'Physician, heal yourself.'" What we have heard You did at Capernaum, do here in Your hometown as well.'" And He said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove Him out of the town and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went away. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*These are Your Words, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

---

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You know what the scariest words of that text are?

It's not that the Nazarites were going to throw Jesus off the cliff.  
The scariest words are the last three: **He went away.**

Throughout the 4 gospels, we never hear of Jesus returning to Nazareth again. **He went away.**  
What happens when Jesus is rejected? The Word of God is rejected.

What happens when Jesus goes away? The Word of God goes away.

It is by God's grace that His Word came to those in Nazareth in the first place.

And even more that Jesus Himself came to them and gathered with them,

And still more, rose up to speak to them.

But their familiarity with Him was their man-made rode block.

He was nothing special, so they thought. Just a tradesman's son. Just a tradesman Himself.

"But listen to Him. Who did He just say He was? What did He just say He was doing?

He made Himself equal to the Spirit-filled Anointed One of God.

He just told us that He was proclaiming the Good News to the captives, and setting them free,  
and opening blind eyes.

Is He calling us blind? I heard that He had healed blind people in Capernaum,

but I haven't seen Him do anything like that here.

Is He saying that we are captives/slaves needing to be set free?

Who does He think He is? Oh, that's right: God's Anointed One, the Messiah."

They couldn't fathom it. Jesus looked and acted so... normal.

And they didn't see themselves as blind or captive.

They didn't need any good news that He would proclaim to them.

Their ungrateful familiarity bred contempt for Jesus.

And yet, Jesus doesn't back down from His assertions. Instead, He doubles down.

He compared these Nazarites to the Israelites in the days of Elijah and Elisha.

This was not a compliment.

Elijah came at a low time in Israel's history and his job was to preach repentance.

He was an austere preacher, direct and unwavering. Remember Jezebel wanted him killed.

We see a little bit of John the Baptizer in him, don't we?

And Elisha came after him. There were signs of a reformation among some in Israel.

Some had repented and were gathering together to hear God's holy Word  
from His prophets.

Elisha even had a number of "schools of the prophets," what we'd call seminaries today.

But he was not respected by all of Israel.

These were men that those Nazarites would have held up with great respect,  
and declared that they were true prophets.

But here was THE True Prophet right in their midst, and they would have none of Him.

They would have none of His austere, direct, or unwavering words of repentance,  
not from this common, uneducated tradesman.

They had no gratitude for His gracious Words, either.

And so they had no gratitude for God's gracious Words.

But here is the really amazing thing: Israel's rejection of God's prophets, didn't stop God from being gracious to others... even those who were His enemies.  
The widow of Zarephath lived in Jezebel's backyard, near Sidon.  
And Naaman, the Syrian general, had been very successful in his raids on Israelite territory.  
And yet, these enemies, upon hearing the prophets and receiving God's grace through them, repented and believed.  
The widow confessed, "**Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.**" <sup>2Kings5:15</sup>  
Naaman confessed, "**Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.**" <sup>1Kings17:24</sup>  
These enemies, when presented with God's grace by His prophets, didn't continue to reject Him, but were grateful and received God's goodness with joy.

But here is the sad part: though these Nazarites would have called themselves God's friends, they were proving themselves to be His enemies.  
And as we just heard, God still calls His enemies to repentance, and still grants them forgiveness, but they wouldn't have it. They wouldn't hear Him.  
They were astonished and marveled at Jesus' words, but they didn't believe them.

If it happened to God's people before, it can happen to God's people again.  
Jesus may not be walking in common ordinary human form among us as He did in Nazareth, but He still comes to us in common ordinary forms today.  
Familiarity has a way of breeding contempt and ingratitude, even among Christians in 2017.  
As in Jesus' day, familiarity with God's prophets, whom we call pastors, especially with their personal foibles can tempt us to disregard God's Word thru them.  
As in Elijah's and St. John the Baptizer's days, familiarity with God's austere Law can be our stumbling block, especially if we are intent on continuing in a pet sin of ours.  
As in Jesus' day, familiarity even of the Gospel, of God's gracious Words of forgiveness through Jesus, can lead us to contempt, to *despise preaching and His Word*.  
We can think to ourselves, "I can go next week; its going to be the same message, anyway."  
Or you might tire of its familiar presentation throughout the entire liturgy.

With such familiarity, we may be led to think that this is all normal and ordinary; that of course God should send us preachers and speak His Word do us.  
And so, this familiarity can tempt us to a lack of appreciation and ingratitude, so that we don't support this ministry with our prayers, talents or our God-given resources.  
But we see where that ingratitude leads to: **Jesus went away**.  
He went to other people who did appreciate God's gracious Words.  
He went to others, even His enemies, who realized they were blind and desired to see; to those who recognized their captivity to sin and wanted freedom from it.

Today, consider your own failings into contempt of God's gracious Words, and pray that He opens your blind eyes and leads you to freedom from your captivity. Do not continue in them. Nor dwell on them, so that you despair.  
Though you have, in your ingratitude, treated God as an enemy, He calls you to repentance and to hear His gracious Words of forgiveness.

See Jesus as the Lover of Souls, who desires even His enemies to be saved.

How much more His own brothers and sisters who have been washed in His Baptism, and been made heirs with Him of paradise.

It was His custom perfectly to desire to hear His Father's gracious Words, thus fulfilling the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandments, for you, in your stead:

*calling upon God's name in every trouble, praying, praising, and giving thanks, and gladly hearing God's Word and learning it*

side by side with His brethren in the temple and synagogues.

His familiarity bred, not contempt, but a deeper contemplation of God's grace.

See Jesus lead you out of your captivity into liberty as He did giving His life for you in death.

There at the brow of Nazareth, the people tried to kill Him. He was not scared to die, but that was not the time nor the place.

He was to be lifted up on a cross for the world to see, for you to see, and to contemplate over and over and over again,

so that the thought and the sight become familiar to you and you think about it often, daily even, as you daily repent of your sins and believe God's gracious Words:

*"You are forgiven."*

In these words you know that Jesus will not go away from you,

but be with you through the temptations, *to guard and keep you,*

*so that in the end you may overcome and retain the victory. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*