

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Well, what are we to take away from today's lessons?

If one doesn't look too closely

one might come to believe only

that the job of a prophet is a tough one;

an audience that doesn't listen or believe,

constant affliction by thorns in the side,

and no honor, even in your own hometown.

Indeed, this might be a right and true understanding

if we happened to be a prophet,

but really,

when it's all said and done,

how many of us are truly prophets?

The truth is,

these stories are really more important

for those of us who are on the other end of the prophecy pipeline;

the listeners.

And if you think these stories were kind of rough on the prophets,

well... you ain't seen nothin' yet.

They're really rough on us listeners.

That's probably why we tend to ignore our role in the story as listeners,

and jump right up to the role of prophet.

But the life of faith is not about "easy."

Never has been,

Never will be.

The life of faith requires work...

and vision.

An old theologian once said,

“When you read God’s word

you must constantly ask yourself:

‘Is it talking to me, and about me?’”

So why is it so important to ask this question?

And why is it so important to ask constantly?

Because God’s word will talk to you constantly...

if you listen.

That’s the big if.

What might we hear

if we were to listen carefully to the word of God from this morning?

What might it be saying *to* us as listeners?

What might it be saying *about* us?

In our first lesson this morning

we hear the next installment of the story of David.

If you paid attention to the verse numbers

you might have noticed that a bit was left out.

When I read it I could see why it was left out,

but in the interest of full disclosure I’ll tell you what happened.

In the excerpt we heard today

it sounds a bit like David is welcomed in to Jerusalem and then he fortifies it,

but that is not what really happened.

David and his army march to the gates of Jerusalem

and find it held against them by the Jebusites

who taunt the Israelites by saying

“You will not come in here,

even the blind and the lame will turn you back.”

David was angered by this taunt

and told his army to take the city by sneaking in through the water shaft,

killing even the blind and lame.

Not one of David's better moments, to be sure,

so you can see why some folks might not be so keen about spreading it around.

Still, it is in the Bible

so it must be there for a reason.

As we will find out as we hear more of David's story throughout the summer,

David is a very human king.

Which is to say that David, like all humans,

has good moments and bad moments.

So, as we listen to this story,

what might God be saying *to* us this morning?

What might God be saying *about* us?

Now is the point where I considered allowing a brief moment of silence for reflection,

but it occurs to me that I may be at risk of getting the cart before the horse.

I'm asking you to wonder

about what God may be saying to us this morning,

but I need to back up and remind you

that the story comes from the books of the prophet Samuel.

Modern scholars tell us that the books of the prophet Samuel

are a collection of stories from various sources

written after the events that are related

and then stitched together to form the final product.

Which is to say that they are a human remembrance of the time of the prophets,

the time when God spoke more directly through human lips.

I know that some people believe the Bible is a divine product,

but I do not believe that is a healthy assumption to make.

The Bible is a document created in time

by people who lived in a specific time and place.

Some may say that that understanding minimizes its power,

but I don't think that is the case at all.

The true power of scripture comes from the history of it's use.

The canon of scripture was set by a gathering of Bishops
after a few hundreds of years experience with the texts.

Those that were clear and helpful were retained,
and those that were less clear, or distracting were not.

It was hard, prayerful and thoughtful work.

After many hundreds of years experience
we can still see the wisdom of their choices.

Though the Jews gave up on prophets after Ezra,
God did not give up on them.

Though the Christians gave up on prophets
when we closed the canon of scripture
and put limits on the written word of God,
God did not give up on us either.

The revelation of Gods word comes to us without limits imposed by humanity.

As God spoke to the Jews thousands of years ago,
God continues to speak to us anew, in many different ways,
even through words thousands of years old.

Sadly, far too little has changed in those thousands of years;
still we do not listen as we should.

In our Gospel lesson today we see something a little different.

We see the people who know Jesus better than anyone else,
the people he grew up with,
reject his ministry and teaching.

The back to back amazement that frames this story
tells us a lot.

In the beginning of the story

the people of his hometown are amazed by his works,

and at the end of the story

Jesus is amazed by their unbelief.

It is easy to dismiss this little vignette

as a hook to get the famous line about “prophets without honor” into the book,

but this story is so much more important than a mere literary ploy.

Important to us who call ourselves Christians,

to us who purport to know Jesus better than anyone else.

If you think about it,

we are today, and every day for that matter,

very much like those people in Nazareth;

the brothers and sisters of Christ.

As we grow in our faith,

as more and more of the living reality that is Christ Jesus becomes revealed to us;

how often do we reject the change,

indeed, sometimes even take offense?

Take offense when the new Christ does not live up to our expectations,

demanding more of us than we think we can give,

or calls us out of our comfort zone.

How often does our dear Lord gaze at us sadly,

amazed at *our* unbelief.

I never cease to give thanks

that God is a loving and generous God,

who continues to pour down upon us the grace we so desperately need,

and yet so often wantonly squander and ignore.

Notice also our Lord’s reaction.

Rejected by his own kin,

Jesus continues to move among them,

healing them even in the midst of their disbelief.

Perhaps it will be the same with us.

Dear Lord I pray that it is so!

Though it may seem dark,

and that we may be beyond redemption at times,

remember that Christ is still moving among us,

easing our fears and curing our illnesses,

and that is certainly cause for hope.

In the face of rejection that goes beyond mere disbelief,

Christ comes to us to heal and to teach.

Even when we get it wrong,

God comes to us where we are

to work in us, on us, and through us.

We do not need to be perfect, thank God,

before God's grace is opened to us.

Though we may not be aware, and even when we resist,

God is with us,

gently healing and teaching.

What is even more wonderful,

is that when we are open to the grace of God,

and truly believe the astounding things we say,

then the amazing power of God's grace comes to full fruition,

filling up our lives and all that we do.

We wonder at the power of God working in us and through us.

We find ourselves more connected to the world around us.

Our neighbors get a little closer.

Our community gets a little larger.

And the boundaries of the kingdom of God grow just a little bit larger.

God, give us this grace always!

Amen.