



Luke 4:21-30

21 Jesus began to speak in the synagogue, ‘This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.’ **22** And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, ‘This is Joseph’s son, surely?’ **23** But he replied, ‘No doubt you will quote me the saying, “Physician, heal yourself” and tell me, “We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside.”’ **24** And he went on, ‘I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country.

25 ‘There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah’s day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, **26** but Elijah was not sent to any one of these; he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. **27** And in the prophet Elisha’s time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian Naaman.’

28 When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. **29** They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, **30** but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

Other readings: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19 Psalm 70 (71) 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

The story of Jesus’ visit to Nazareth, which we began reading last week, is placed by Luke at the very start of Jesus’ ministry. The people are delighted by the ‘gracious words’, literally ‘the words of grace’, which he spoke. Quite suddenly, the atmosphere changes, and Jesus challenges the people’s expectations. He knows that their approval is superficial. Prophets are generally rejected by their own.

Jesus illustrates this by referring to the two Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha. Elijah encountered persecution in Israel and both prophets performed mighty works for those who were not Jews. Jesus stresses that the healing mercy of God is for all. The people of Nazareth react in annoyance, reject their own prophet and threaten physical violence.

Luke anticipates here the different reactions to the preaching of Jesus found in the rest of the gospel. Acceptance, rejection and violence will all be present.

What is my reaction to the preaching of Jesus?

Have I ever experienced being ‘a prophet rejected by his own people’?

We ask that Jesus’ words of grace will heal all bitterness and resentment.

We ask that we ourselves may be ‘good news’ to the stranger.