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Our gospel text today is, in the words of Paul Harvey, “the rest of the story” from last week’s first part of the story. Today’s story dramatically departs from last week’s part one of the story. I’m sure few, if any, of us would, in a vacuum, guess at the way the story unfolds.

As you may recall from last week, Jesus,  
fresh of his baptism, temptation in the wilderness, and powerful ministry in  
Capernaum,  
Shows up back in his hometown,  
Goes to worship in the synagogue—as was his custom—and  
reads these powerful words from Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to set free those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then Jesus preaches to the congregation his one-sentence sermon:  
“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The story continues with today’s text, and we learn that “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

Wow. The local boy has done pretty well for himself.

Or has he . . . ? Because then, something happens. I’m not sure what it is. We aren’t told specifically, but judging from Jesus’s response, something is up.

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<sup>1</sup>Title is a lyric from a song by Taylor Swift.

The people who seemed enthralled and who spoke well of him became so livid that they were ready to throw him off a cliff.

What causes his hometown crowd to turn to murderous outrage?

It seems the series of sayings of Jesus has upset them. So, let's look at those saying and see what caused such a hateful response.

First he appeals to a familiar saying that is found in both Jewish and Greek writings: "Doctor, cure yourself." While this seems sort of odd, it could be a preemptive statement, anticipating that the crowd will say that Jesus should deal with his own shortcomings before telling others of their shortcomings.

He then gives a second saying, familiar at that time, "No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown," which again seems to be preemptively saying, "You're not going to like the truth that I am about to tell you."

And what is that truth? Jesus gives two examples of *unexpected outsiders* who figure prominently as models of faith in Israelite history.

The prophet Elijah went to the poor widow at Zarephath in Sidon,  
The prophet Elisha healed the Syrian army leader, a leper known as Naaman.

Pretty interesting, huh? Out of all the heroes of the faith—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David—Jesus names two non-Israelites. Both represented the extreme "other" to the synagogue crowd, driving home his point that the good news for the poor was for more than just them.

One scholar put it this way: this message "threatened to dismantle the status quo and the stereotypes that defined the religious and social boundaries of those in the synagogue." (Gay L. Byron)

Barbara Brown Taylor tells her own version of this story in a short study on this passage. She writes:

"[The people there] were not furious because Jesus had made special claims of himself. They were furious because he had taken a swing at their sense of divine privilege - and he had used their own scriptures to do it.... Once, in a minor attempt to preach it straight, I suggested that Christians who wanted

to take Jesus' sermon to heart might start by donating some of their outreach funds to a local Muslim community that was trying to buy land for a cemetery... Luckily, I was preaching in a town with no cliffs.”

What was true in Jesus's day is true today. You may know of this recent illustration of this kind of *speaking truth to power*.

Episcopal Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde delivered a powerful and compassionate sermon at a national prayer service at the Washington National Cathedral on the Tuesday after the presidential inauguration. With the President and Vice President in the sanctuary, the bishop challenged the new executive orders harming vulnerable communities, including immigrants and LGBTQ+ Americans.

“In the name of our God, I ask you to *have mercy* upon the people in our country,” Bishop Budde proclaimed. “And we’re scared now. There are gay, lesbian and transgender children in Democratic, Republican and independent families — some who fear for their lives.”

Just Like Jesus’s hometown crowd didn’t like to be asked to care for the least of these, neither did the president, who later took to social media to denounce the Bishop. I’ll not read his mean-spirited and vitriolic rhetoric, you can find online if you like, but let’s just say it was the verbal equivalent of wanting to throw her off a cliff.

The powerful—then and now—do not like to be called on the abuse of their power and privilege, their lack of care for the “least of these,” or their lack of mercy.

Bishop Budde did exactly what prophets throughout the scriptures, including Jesus in our text this morning, were called to do: speak truth to power. Her job, *and our job*, is not to comfort the powerful by confirming their beliefs but to speak for those who have no voice.

It is not an easy place to be, but the Bishop spoke with grace, aplomb and above all, love.

And, even as we are called to speak out, we are called to do so lovingly, as we heard this morning in the familiar words from 1 Cor. 13, which Dennis read:

1 If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have *prophetic powers* and

understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.

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In closing, I'd like to share another example of a prophetic proclamation that seeks to be gentle and loving in the face of cruelty and injustice.

Our own Bishop, along with the ELCA Bishops in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, have also issued a statement condemning recent developments in our public sphere:

In recent days, the heightened rhetoric of violence and newly enacted Executive Orders compel us to remind people of faith of God's fundamental blessing of all human life. In the language of the Bible, we say that all people are made in the image of God.

Every person – without exception – has inherent dignity and value because all people are made in God's own image. Human dignity and value come from God. People of faith throughout our region, and indeed this world, are compelled to speak and act toward others in ways that honor the image in which we all are made. All people and groups deserve to be treated with dignity and respect in our common speech and in our public and private interactions. [Jesus summarized this] teaching in “the Golden Rule,” “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (Matthew 7:12)

The apostle Paul wrote in the book of Galatians, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23) These are the traits that guide our interactions with all our neighbors and inform our conduct in daily life. These are the characteristics that embolden us even as we work for justice and peace.

Across this region we are grateful for the many people of good will who are working to increase dialogue, seek the common good, and treat our neighbors, near and far, as those who bear the image of God. We are with you in prayer as, together, we seek to live lives worthy of this ancient admonition from God's word, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any

of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”  
(Leviticus 19:18)<sup>2</sup>

Let us go this week remembering Jesus’s call to resist and speak out and remembering that,

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

. . . And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three,  
and the greatest of these is love.

Thanks be to God, **Amen.**

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<sup>2</sup>Bishop Constanze Hagmaier, South Dakota Synod - ELCA  
Bishop Regina Hassanally, Southeastern Minnesota Synod - ELCA  
Bishop Patricia Lull, Saint Paul Area Synod - ELCA  
Bishop Tessa Moon Leiseth, Eastern North Dakota Synod - ELCA  
Bishop Jen Nagel, Minneapolis Area Synod - ELCA  
Bishop Amy Odgren, Northeastern Minnesota Synod - ELCA  
Bishop Dee Pederson, Southwestern Minnesota Synod - ELCA  
Bishop Craig A. Schweitzer, Western North Dakota Synod - ELCA  
Bishop Bill Tesch, Northwestern Minnesota Synod - ELCA