

Last weekend I was at the 4 p.m. Mass, Fr Brendan gave a little teaser in his homily about this weekend's gospel reading. He said he didn't want to give it away but that if we wanted to know the rest of the story we could read it ourselves.

Well I took him up on that even though I knew how the story ended. But I went one step further and read a little more of the readings for this weekend. Here is what I found out.

In today's first reading we hear God tell Jeremiah about the big plans he has for him. God told him before he was even conceived in his mother's womb; Jeremiah had been chosen to be a prophet. If you read the entire passage instead of the just the selection offered today, you see that Jeremiah is not very happy about God's choice for him. He objects that he is too young; he tells God he doesn't know how to speak. God's answering "pep talk" reassures Jeremiah—God will be with him, he can do this! After lots of reassurances and promises, God says, "gird your loins; stand up and tell them all that I command you." In other words, Jeremiah has to stand up and be a man! God will be there and will help, but Jeremiah has to do this! In spite of his misgivings and his actual weaknesses, Jeremiah is God's chosen one, for better or for worse! The rest of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah plays out the drama between God and Jeremiah that starts in today's reading.

Our faith tells us that, like Jeremiah, God has called us since before we were born. We have always belonged to God, and at baptism, that relationship has been sealed. God is with us to save us, but there is no guarantee that the way will be easy all the time. In fact, we can be sure it won't be! Jesus has told us we need to take up

our cross in order to follow him. Jesus the prophet has followed right in the footsteps of Jeremiah the prophet.

When I looked at the Gospel I wondered how we would react if a proven miracle worker were coming to our parish this weekend. I would think that the house would be packed. The families of the sick would stake out the aisle seats so they could reach out to touch the preacher as he passed by. Perhaps a skeptical reporter or two, with a photographer, would be on hand for the show. Boosted attendance might mean an extra collection, a chance to recruit more parishioners. Everyone would be proud that this event was taking place here, in our parish, our town.

Today's Gospel invites us to imagine such a scene in Nazareth. Add to the excitement the fact that the miracle man who has already worked the crowds in Capernaum is a hometown boy, Jesus of Nazareth. His family is here, sharing the anticipation and the pride of place. One of their own is in the news, already famous, a celebrity.

How quickly the mood changes when, after his thrilling announcement that the [mes si an ic](#) promise of the prophet Isaiah is coming true in himself, in their very hearing, this Jesus so familiar to them as the son of Joseph the carpenter does not so much refuse to do miracles but is not able to because of their great lack of faith in Him. Instead he quotes the saying "No prophet is accepted in his native place," and reminds them that other prophets worked their miracles among foreigners instead.

How sad that their familiarity with Jesus blinded them to the truth about him! If only they had faith in him instead of thinking that Jesus had to prove to them who he really was.

The synagogue assembly rises up and hustles Jesus out of the town to the top of a high hill, ready to cast him down to his death. Jesus, bold as a prophet, gathers his cloak around him and marches through their midst and departs. His introductory day ends in his expulsion from his own hometown.

It seems a discouraging, even disastrous beginning for one sent to bring the good news. But what had just taken place was necessary at the outset of his mission. Jesus was God's servant, obliged to no other influence or loyalty, owned by no party, race or group, even his own blood family. The Holy Spirit that entered him at his baptism, drove him into the wilderness to be tempted, and then guided him back to Galilee and would soon be sending him down to Jerusalem.

Jesus was independent of any human consideration or control. Jesus would even astonish and disappoint his own disciples with talk not of success but of apparent failure, even death at the hands of the authorities. His rejection in Nazareth was just a preview of the rejection awaiting him in Jerusalem

Paul may have understood that also as he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul was a seminary student whose family was wealthy enough to pay for most of his education. He started out as just a young man studying perhaps to be a rabbi or studying Jewish law. When Paul had to support himself he became a

tentmaker. He was a normal, idealistic young man and his courage was extraordinary. He was not very eloquent with the spoken word, which he comments on, but he then turned into a zealot to rid the world of a new cult who called themselves followers of Christ, but he did bring his personality to bear on his love for the Lord. And his zeal was turned into an asset for the Lord.

Paul writes of his motivation, the motivation of all individuals who become world-changers: that being love. Paul lists the great spiritual virtues -- tongues, prophecy, faith, knowledge, service -- but acknowledges that without love, these virtues cannot make a difference. This love is not a feeling; it is the choice to serve God regardless of the personal cost. This is the self-sacrificing love of Jesus. This is the love that makes a difference.

And it was a sacrifice for Paul, because of his past there were not many in the Christian community who trusted him or believed he could have changed that much in such a short period of time. But with the love of God in his heart he carried on to become one of the most loved apostles of our time.

Now what about us, you and me, here and now, what does all this mean for us? What are we suppose to do? Today's Responsorial Psalm may give us a clue. We are to take refuge in the Lord, to put our trust in him, to be not afraid of what he has appointed us to do since before we were born. We are to proclaim his wondrous deeds and sing of his salvation.

So with that in mind I will do my part. (Sung) For as long as I shall live, I will

testify to love. I'll be your witness in the silences when words are not enough. With every breath I take, I will give thanks to God above. For as long as I shall live, I will testify to love.