

- Imagine a world with no cell phones, no cameras, no text messaging, no social media – not even TV or Radio. Imagine you could only receive information about the outside world in a very limited manner -usually by word of mouth. The reliability, the accuracy of the information you received would depend on the source and the trust you placed in that source.
- This was the world of those people in our Gospel reading. This was Jesus' world.
- Jesus grew up in Nazareth but travelled to other towns and villages teaching and healing. In today's Gospel He returns home. Home. Where he grew up. Among people he knew and was comfortable with. Comfortable enough to share a truth about who he really was on the inside. His true identity.
- But we know revealing things about who we really are deep down on the inside can be risky business. When we reveal what's inside it might challenge people to view us differently. We risk criticism, even rejection.
- In our Gospel reading we find Jesus at a religious service in His hometown. And Jesus wants to and does reveal His inner self to the people who probably thought they knew Him best. People who watched Him grow up.
- Jesus tells them He is the promised Messiah, the Son of God! The one every Jewish person hoped and was waiting for! This was shocking to them. There was no text messages or video streaming from people outside of Nazareth showing Jesus healing and casting out demons in other towns and villages.
- So, they didn't buy it. Couldn't see the real presence of God in Jesus. Why?
- They were stuck judging Him on outward appearance. They didn't have the interest or take the time to listen and learn more. They thought they knew all about Him. Isn't this Mary's son? Joseph's kid? The carpenter? We saw Him grow up here. Who does He think He is making these wild claims?

- It would be like me telling you I was the Messiah. You would have the same reaction – He’s lost his mind – Messiah? No way.
- So, many in that synagogue got angry, criticized Jesus, threw Him out. Why? Because He didn’t look like they expected the Messiah to look (there was no kingly appearance). They were living in difficult times, under oppressive rule by the Roman empire. They expected a strong, warrior-like savior to overthrow the Empire. Certainly, this carpenter was not the messiah. He just didn’t fit the mold!
- And we read Jesus couldn’t perform many miracles and healings in His own home town due to their lack of faith. How sad is that.
- Why couldn’t He perform those miracles? Because Jesus’ miracles and healings **weren’t** done for show. They were rooted in love and concern for those who reached out to Him in faith and trust. Before almost every healing Jesus performed we hear Jesus say: “Your faith has saved you”.
- There was little faith in His hometown. Sometimes those closest to us can be our toughest critics.
- Today’s Gospel has an important message for each of us.
- And that is: Don’t be quick to rush to judgement about people and certainly don’t rush to judgement about God.
- We tend to do this, don’t we? Because we are human, we look at things and people and make judgments about them all the time. We can’t help ourselves, it is part of being human!
- She’s tall, He’s short, She is pretty, He is handsome, she looks mean. We make judgments about people based on how they dress, where they live.
- Sometimes we make these judgments based on past experiences in our lives. For example, if a red-haired kid bullied you as a child you might develop a mistrust of red-haired people.

- Some judgments we make can even be comical. My Father-in-law would say never drive to close to a person wearing a hat – they are the worst drivers.
- Of course, when we take these judgments to an extreme and categorize people, we walk on the very dangerous ground of prejudice, fear and hate.
- We can also rush to conclusions or judgment about God.
- Especially when we have thoughts like: God can't ever forgive me for doing this or that; God doesn't care about me because I prayed but this or that didn't happen; (I once heard a preacher say that when we get disappointed due to an unanswered prayer, maybe God is saying: "I love you too much to answer that prayer. I have something better planned for you")
- Our Gospel today cautions when we place limits on God, - as those people did on Jesus- we limit the countless opportunities for healing, for comfort, for miracles, for the love God has in store for us. Just look what the people in Jesus' hometown missed out on.
- And when we rush to judgement and conclusions about others – especially when we judge on outward appearances – we can miss the really important part of that person. What is on the inside. Who they really are – their personality, their talents, what is in their heart and soul. We can miss God's presence in them.
- We can miss the miracles, the healing, the love God wants to send to us through that person. And we can miss their needs and the chance to bring God's love to someone in need, miss the chance to be God's presence for them.
- Those people in Jesus hometown could not see the presence of God in Jesus. They didn't take the time to look closely and listen. They shut Him out and missed out.
- Our Gospel urges us not to make the same mistake. Urges us to welcome Jesus into our lives and to bring Jesus into the lives of those around us.

- In our first reading today, the prophet Jeremiah reminds us we can do this. Listen to these beautiful assurances from God: I formed you, I know you, I appoint you, go tell them about my love, I am with you. The charge to let God in and be His love in the lives of others couldn't be any clearer.
- And in our 2nd reading St. Paul tells us how God has equipped us to do this work. God fills us with the gift of His love.
- Paul tells us love is the most valuable gift God gives us because it changes us.
- It makes us patient and kind even to those we may not like a whole lot. Love helps us to be thankful for others rather than jealous of them. Love helps us not to be rude but to be welcoming and patient. It helps us to put up with all types of annoyances without losing our tempers.
- Love changes us from people who think only of ourselves to people who are concerned for others.
- It is the greatest gift God gives us because it is the gift of Himself.
- We know God is love. We were taught that truth at a very young age. In Sunday school our teacher would ask: "Who is God" and we would respond: "God is love".
- So, here is an exercise to do on this cold snowy day. Sometime today take that second reading and every time you see the word "love" replace it with the word "God". You will see what a truly magnificent, life changing gift God's presence really is.
- And the amazing thing is all we have to do to receive this gift is to ask. It is given freely when we pray, go to penance and in a very special way the love of God fills us when we receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- Our world is in desperate need of God's love. There is far more criticism and judgment than there is understanding and compassion. There is far too much anger, fear, isolation and division. But as Jeremiah reminds us in our first reading: these

things will not prevail – because God is with us. And God depends on us.

- So, let's make our prayer this week that we more actively use that gift of love God has given us and that we overcome our tendencies to judge others and instead slow down and look for God's presence in all the people and places He waits to meet us.
- God bless you.