

Before I began interviewing with the call committee here at Faith Lutheran, I had interviewed with the call committee at First Lutheran Church in Muskegon. Pastor Bill Uetricht, the pastor with whom I had worked as Music Director for nearly ten years, really wanted me to come back and serve as Associate Pastor in that congregation. First Lutheran is a large community of faith and the work load is heavy for one pastor. We had worked well together in the past and we both knew it would be a joy to again work together serving in ministry. So, one year ago this month, I did an interview with First Lutheran's call committee. Now, I have to tell you that First Lutheran was not only the place where I had served as Music Director for many years, it was also my home congregation, the faith community in which I had grown up. So, I found it very interesting that many of the questions the call committee asked of me had to do with whether or not I could work as a pastor to the people as opposed to being solely a musician. Now, this question was really more about **their** perceptions and assumptions about my identity than my own understanding of myself as a person called to ministry of Word and Sacrament. However, the call committee members had only known me as a musician and that was the identity they **assumed** was my primary identity.

Isaac Asimov once said, “Your **assumptions** are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won’t come in.” I think that advice is great advice for all of us to heed. It is also great advice to keep in mind when looking at today’s gospel reading. Quite frankly, the power of God is always breaking through and shattering our assumptions. This is true today and it was true for Jesus when he began his ministry.

The writer of Mark’s gospel tells us Jesus has begun his ministry by healing people, casting out demons and proclaiming this new understanding of God. He has been traveling around and ministering to all kinds of people who did **not** know him, and they have been marveling at what God is doing. So today, we find Jesus making his way back home to Nazareth. Jesus’ visit to his hometown is not a social call for the purpose of visiting friends and family. He comes back to Nazareth to teach a new understanding of the nature of God, to proclaim who he is and share his mission. He begins teaching in the synagogue to the people who **do** know him and at first they are amazed by what he says. But then, he is quickly met with disdain and rejection by his hometown neighbors and friends. They begin saying, “He’s just a carpenter – Mary’s boy. We’ve known him since he was a kid. We know his brothers, James, Justus, Jude and

Simon, and his sisters. Who does he think he is?” The people in his hometown do not know where he has gotten such power or wisdom. Jesus shatters their **assumptions** because he, this person they have known all of his life, is not what they expected in a prophet, let alone a messiah. Quite frankly, it is their knowledge of Jesus that keeps them from **really knowing** him and benefiting from what he is saying and doing. And, to accept him as a prophet or messiah was to call into question much of what they thought they knew about the world, about people and about themselves.

As we look at the remarkable events of the past two weeks within our own culture, I have to ask, could today’s gospel reading serve as a warning to all who assume they really know Jesus? In light of some of the hatred we have seen espoused by people who call themselves “Christian”, what does this say to any of us who assume we have the correct answers and, in our certainty, think we know the mind of God? Far too often, we who are part of communities of faith assume God fits into our preconceived boxes, and we are slow to accept anything that challenges our deeply embedded assumptions. And, it is so difficult to talk about or talk with those who are different from us because of our sense of surety and preconceived notions. Whether people are different in terms of age, occupation, economic status, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation, we tend to have a construct about how

people *should* be and, when we meet someone who differs from that construct, we tend to find it threatening. Frankly, it is so very difficult for us to see Jesus in any who we categorize as “other.” Far too often, we try to mold Jesus into **our** image of what we think Jesus should be, a Jesus who we are comfortable with, a Jesus who will not challenge our assumptions. I am reminded of something theologian, John Dominic Crossan, once said - “Beware of finding a Jesus entirely congenial to you.”

When Jesus went back to Nazareth he proclaimed the good news of God’s presence and he shattered people’s assumptions. He was different from what they **assumed** a prophet *should* be. They tried to dismiss his proclamation and they rejected him. And, the truth the matter is, this story is about us. All too often, we are tempted to do the same, reducing someone who challenges us to a single attribute about that person, whether it is skin color or age or orientation. We often dismiss them and thereby fail to receive the totality of the person God has created and redeemed, the person who is offered to us as a gift. It is very difficult for us to talk about the issues and stuff that we are currently facing as people, difficult to talk about prejudice and racism, because our assumptions are challenged. It is frightening to talk about perceived changing moral values that test assumptions we have held for many years. We want to keep

things the same, gather with those who look and think like us, and draw the boundaries a little tighter around those we think are “in” and those we think are “out.” Yet, we know that this is **not** what God calls us to do. The truth of the matter is, every time we try to draw a line between who we think is “in” and who is “out,” we will find Jesus on the other side of the line.

When Jesus was rejected by his own friends and neighbors, it was their knowledge **of** him that kept them from **really** knowing him and benefiting from what he was saying and doing. And, it is the same for us. Far too often, it is our assumptions and what we **do** know about Jesus that keep us from really discovering Jesus’ presence in those we consider “other.” It is our assumptions that keep us from discovering God’s movement in a changing world.

Today’s gospel reading reminds us that this Jesus is always going to be shattering our assumptions about who he is. This Jesus who willingly went to the cross because of God’s love for this world, totally shattered all assumptions about what a messiah should look like and do. And, just maybe, Jesus continues shattering our assumptions, our “windows on the world,” scrubbing them off so we can more clearly see the light of God’s love and grace.