4th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle C – 1/31/16

“Imperfect Instruments of Faith”

Jeremiah 1:4-5; 17-19
Psalm 71: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15, 17
1 Corinthians 13:4-13

“TODAY this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” What would you think if I or any other clergy were
to say that after proclaiming the Gospel? You’d probably be, like, “yah, right! Who do you think you are?”
“We KNOW who YOU are!” I know this all too well having been a part of St. Paul’s most of my life. As
many of you may know, I have been a parishioner of St. Paul’s for a long time. My family moved here when I
was in first grade back in 19-blah, blah, blah. Some of you knew my parents and knew me growing up. Most
of you who have known me are probably still scratching your heads that I am here preaching and serving as a
deacon…All I can say is that this is proof that God has a sense of humor and works in mysterious way!

I’m not going to lie, it’s been a challenge for me as well. A couple of weeks prior to my ordination I
met with Bishop Campbell to find out where I would serve and he told me that I would be here at St. Paul. He
then asked if I was prepared to handle being assigned to the parish I grew up in and dealing with the
preconceptions that people had of me: an acknowledgement of Jesus’ other quote about being accepted in ones
own native place. I said, “I hope so.”

Jesus is confronted with this same challenge in today’s Gospel, but on a much, MUCH more
monumental scale. It is difficult to challenge the status quo; to stand up for the unpopular truth; to live, practice
and share our faith fully, especially while overcoming the preconceptions of others. Yet this is exactly what we
are all called to do today. Through our Baptism we have a commitment and are challenged to live in the Truth
of our faith and with love and confidence despite our imperfections, setbacks and resistance of others.

“TODAY this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”. These are the first words of today’s Gospel and
they were the LAST words from last week’s Gospel. Last week we heard Jesus read from the Prophet Isaiah in
which his identity and ministry are foretold. Jesus is the anointed of God, sent to do the work of the Father here
on earth. His message is that these great promises of God are coming to fruition. He is saying to his
townsfolk…I am the one who is to fulfill these prophesies and I am here to begin NOW!

The Jewish people had been waiting for centuries for the promised Messiah and had become accustomed
to waiting, expecting and hoping. But they also had, in their collective minds, an image of what the Messiah
would be like and how he would fulfill God’s promise. Although the townspeople spoke highly of him and
were amazed at his words, Jesus certainly did not meet or fulfill their expectations of the one promised. Their
hope turned to skepticism and as Jesus continued to speak the Truth, their skepticism turned to fury, both of
which made them blind to the presence of God in their midst resulting in, “not [being] accepted in his own
native place.”

Jesus and the prophets came to deliver TRUTH and sometimes the truth hurts! As a result, they were
rejected because of the preconceptions of those to whom they were sent. But the tragedy of the prophets lies in
the fact that they were sent, not to judge or lay incredible guilt trips on those to whom they were sent, but rather
they were sent out of Mercy and the infinite Love of the Father who desires nothing more than Love in return.
They were sent to bring those led astray back into communion with God including the Gentiles or those
different from them and challenged them to True Faith in God, based in LOVE for all.

This is why we hear from Paul’s powerful letter to the Corinthians which we are accustomed to hearing
in the context of a joyous wedding. This reading is here to remind us that the attributes of Love between human
beings are reflections of the perfected Love that God has for us. God is Love! and it is with Love and Mercy
that Jesus stands before a crowd growing in hostility and challenges them with the Truth in order for them to
remain in God’s Love.

We are challenged to do the same thing. We have a crisis of Faith in our world today where religion and
faith in God are meeting with more and more hostility. Fanaticism and apathy, two ends of the spectrum of
faith, are attempting to erode the work begun in Christ. Religious fanatics are attempting to put an end to those
whose beliefs are not theirs, while those who are apathetic have either dismissed God altogether or subjectified
religion and matters of faith to their own personal strain of “BELIEF”. We see this among Catholics as well. In the middle is The Church, which we believe is the instrument and safe deposit of the objective Truth as handed on by Christ. Yes, it is a Church comprised of imperfect believers and imperfect ministers but the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, nonetheless is here to convey the Truth by word and example to the world.

Faith demands that we go before sometimes hostile crowds to deliver the Truth; not judgmentally or self-righteously but out of Love and the desire reunite others with God’s Love in a tangible way. To do so however can be difficult and dangerous. If Jesus experienced rejection, how can we expect to experience anything different today? That’s why in our first reading we are reminded that God has a plan for us despite our shortcomings. If we CHOOSE to accept to do His work with Love, He will deliver us and that nothing can prevail against us.

This is what discipleship is all about and what we were called to through our baptism. We must learn our faith and put what we have learned here into action; it’s not too late!!! God has the power to mold and change our lives and the lives of those we least expect in order to become his instruments: I am case and point! And this is why we are all here today: to be molded into instruments of His will. If we live our Faith with the Hope of Salvation but most importantly out of Love then we are doing the prophetic work of God here on earth. Faith, Hope and Love; these are the theological virtues and as St. Paul said in our second reading the greatest of these is Love. Robert Baron, the now Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, said, “when we stand before God our HOPING will be over and we will no longer need FAITH because we will see God as he is and all we’ll be left with is LOVE.”

If we take courage and learn and live our faith and take what we have experienced in this Mass today out into the world to share it, with LOVE, then WE are following in the footsteps of Christ AND in a real way we can say with confidence, “Today this scripture will be fulfilled in our hearing it and LIVING it!”