



## February 3, 2019 – Unwelcome Given by Rev. Mattei

I spent four years in the Windy City to complete my theological studies. When I returned home I was ready to kiss the ground which I had so terribly missed and embrace the large crowd of relatives who came to the airport to pick me up. Four years is a long time to stay away from your family. My youngest brother was now sixteen year old young man and I had left him a child!

I imagine the villagers were ecstatic to see back one of their own when Jesus came home: fame of his early deeds in Capernaum and his teaching engagements in synagogues through the surrounding country had reached them. Surely, he had achieved that level of knowledge and wisdom during long times of prayer and study. Hearers of the story have been let into Jesus' private background by Luke who has revealed to us how Jesus' spiritual preparation brought him to the banks of the Jordan to be baptized by John and confirmed in his vocation by a heavenly voice ([Luke 3:21-22](#)), and then brought by the Spirit to the wilderness where he was tested ([Luke 4:1-13](#)).

Now, finally, with that strong background which has prepared him for public life, Jesus is invited to read to his own congregation. He doesn't just read; he goes on to interpret the passage of Isaiah which has been handed to him: God's promise of the new age is fulfilled in him. What a remarkable and courageous disclosure! The people seem pleased with this revelation: who wouldn't be after waiting for centuries that Israel's fortunes be turned by the long-awaited Messiah? Generations have expected God's salvation and it was finally here. But the excitement doesn't last long. The amazement at Jesus' words is tainted by background noise and cynical jealousy: wasn't he Joseph's son? In other words, how could God choose one from such a lowly condition?

Jesus is quick to pick up on their resistance covered by polite smiles and euphoric enthusiasm. He probes further to reveal and unmask their cynical and condescending remarks: their acknowledgment of him, up to that point, is self-centered and self-serving. But God's grace does not come cheap: divine favor is not to be taken for granted ([Luke 3:8-9](#)). Jesus reminds them that God's salvation is intended for the whole world ([Luke 4:24-28](#)) and this seems to sting the chosen people who had developed a sense of entitlement, and don't quite understand that God's intention for their election as the chosen people is for them to be the catalyst for a universal Shalom ([Gen 12:1-3](#); [Isaiah 45:20-23](#); [Is 49:1-7](#)). His town folks did not appreciate this second part of the sermon. It reminded them of God's chastisement of Israel who, centuries before Jesus' time, had grown despondent and ignored compassion, and had forgotten God's generosity toward them: "I gave you a land you did not labor for, and cities you did not build, though you live in them; you are eating from vineyards and olive groves you did not plant."

(Joshua 24:13) and “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19: 33-34; see also [Deut 10:12-22](#))

For this, the churchgoers of Nazareth were ready to hurl Jesus off the town cliff. It’s fine to know and embrace a prophet and a servant who is committed to the poor, the abused, the forgotten, but when we are told we are the ones who follow Jesus only nominally and are complacent about our call to serve and spread the good news than we feel uncomfortable and even defensive. The world is tired of a Church that talks a good talk but is not demonstrative of Jesus’ life. We tend to claim for ourselves the benefits of his death and resurrection but we forget the example of his life which can bring true salvation. He has called us to follow and learn from him, imitating his love for the stranger, the afflicted and the outcast, but we allow our fears to spill over and overwhelm us with anxiety, hatred, and all sorts of prejudice towards those who look and sound different, the strangers already in our midst or at our doors. Fear seems to control us. If that is the case, we are limited in our discipleship, in our witnessing and in our prophetic announcement of the kingdom of heaven because we are afraid to be totally open to God and to the neighbor. We are afraid to lose our privileges, our friends, our life style.

The world doesn’t need an indifferent and complacent Church. What the world needs is a Church that isn’t afraid of making waves and rocking boats; a Church that does not confuse quietism with silence and peace; a prophetic Church that denounces abuses and injustices; a Church that follows a Jesus who is historical and relevant for real life.

Let us imitate Jesus in practical ways by loving and showing compassion, by serving and promoting life; let us follow him who sets the bar for what it means to be fully human. Let us repent of our sense of superiority and entitlement, and let us turn to our hurting siblings confessing our indifference and recommitting ourselves to love Jesus in the other.

Let’s look at ourselves this past week:

Have we been judgmental towards ourselves and other over looks, the color of the skin, the weight...

Have we carried hatred in our heart...

Have we refrained from showing concern, generosity, compassion...

Have we have been silent in the face of hatred and injustice...

Have we chosen an easy way out to stay in our comfort zone?

If that is so, Lord, have mercy.

Yet, again. If this past week

We have mastered control over our judgmental impulses;

If we have carried light and love in our heart;

If we have not been silent in the face of hatred and injustice;

If we have stretched ourselves in faith

Then, we can pray: Lord, we trust you; increase our faith!