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“No prophet is accepted in his own native place” (Luke 4:24).

*2 Kgs 5:1-15; Luke 4:24-30*

Jesus enraged his relatives and neighbors with the saying that no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Their anger was twofold: Jesus had challenged their sense of entitlement to God’s preferential love over other nations, and they were indignant at Jesus’ claim to be a prophet.

We hear the first complaint in the rhetoric of exceptionalism about the United States being special among nations because of its military and economic prowess. This rhetoric is particularly disturbing during a crisis in which international cooperation is needed to address a pandemic. “America First” may be predictable political cant, but it is profoundly self-defeating.

Jesus’ pushback to religious provincialism in Nazareth was supported by the two examples he cited. During a prolonged famine, the Prophet Elijah only aided one widow in the land of Sidon. The Prophet Elisha healed only one leper, Naaman the Syrian. The point was clear; God’s saving love was universal, not just exclusively for Israel.

The powerful story about Naaman the leper should get our attention. As well, Pope Francis’ insistence that 65 million refugees fleeing wars, poverty and environmental crises are part of a single human family is a prophetic repudiation of fear-driven nationalism when humanity itself and the fate of the planet, our common home, are

at stake. Up until now, his voice and his cogent and compelling exhortations have been praised but largely ignored.

The Word of God is alive and active, addressing us with practical and timely urgency. The integral nature of the world's multiple crises—financial, social, geopolitical and humanitarian now being highlighted by the pandemic-- make this year's Lent a season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving like no other in our memory. It is a summons to discipleship, and no time to reject the prophets being sent to guide us back from the brink.

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