Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Jesus began to reproach the towns where most of his mighty deeds had been done” (Matt 11:20).

Isa 7:1-9; Matt 11:20-24

The biblical writers did not hold back when it came to blasting their opponents. They were superb at bringing down the pretentious and the ungrateful. Political speechwriters and producers of attack commercials could learn from these rhetorical masters. The Prophet Isaiah calls the royal plotters against Judah “these two stumps of smoldering brands” and reassures King Ahaz that “This shall not stand; it shall not be!”

Jesus unleashes woe on Bethsaida and Chorazin for not responding to his preaching and mighty deeds. He compares Capernaum to Sodom, a name synonymous with iniquity, for its failure to repent. His frustration comes early in his ministry in Galilee. By the time he reaches Jerusalem, he breaks down weeping over the city for missing the time of its visitation and ignoring his warnings of the disasters to come.

We say we want prophets and wisdom figures who will guide society to be proactive about problems before they become crises, but history shows that real change comes reluctantly and often too late. Consider Pope Francis’ clear warning almost five years ago about the urgent need for policy changes to protect the environment. Or, as the worst pandemic in our lifetime hits and other countries are bringing it under control, the United States, the largest and wealthiest industrial nation in the world, is playing politics against science as we face uncontrolled virus spread and

economic lockdown.

The Word of God is present and timely. While the Lectionary lays out its scriptural lessons in three-year cycles, a Living Voice is addressing us with both comfort and warning. Pope Francis' daily homilies help us to listen to both the Word and world events in dialogue. Our free response is part of this dialogue. We do not need to wait for leaders to act, and worldwide protests show that ordinary people, especially the young, are more attuned to crises than governments.

The Gospels, like history, art and science, tell us to be courageous and creative when it is time to navigate from failed systems to new ways of thinking to meet challenges. Jesus always has Good News, parables and the example of his love and forgiveness to show us how to go forward when fear and fatalism paralyze hope or propose extreme solutions over the hard work of real change. As always, prophets are among us and mighty works are being done if we have eyes to see and ears to hear beyond the noise and misdirection. Isaiah teaches us to trust in God as we meet each crisis: "Take care and remain tranquil and do not fear; let not your courage fail."

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