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

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

Today's political landscape is full of quicksand, with media-generated crisis pursuing anyone who is in power or trying to stay in power. As major figures rise and fall, it seems all the more amazing how Pope Francis is moving almost under the radar to address tensions in the Middle East with his spiritual diplomacy to build bridges between the church and Islam.

Jesus also had to navigate a minefield of traps and dilemmas as he fulfilled God's will. His initial success attracted both misunderstanding and opposition. The crowds wanted a messiah; his own disciples wanted glory without suffering; the scribes and Pharisees sought to trip him up; the Herodians, Romans and temple establishment were wary of his intentions and growing popularity.

Jesus returned to Nazareth to inaugurate his mission in the synagogue by claiming one of Isaiah's messianic texts was fulfilled in him. His own family and neighbors were astonished by his audacity and then disappointed that he did not work many miracles for them because of their lack of faith. When Jesus quoted a familiar adage about prophets not being accepted in their native place, illustrating it with two examples of prophetic intervention for outsiders, the hometown crowd was enraged and tried to throw him off a cliff. It was hardly a propitious beginning for the road ahead.

What seems clear is that Jesus was listening to one Source of inspiration and encouragement -- the voice of the Spirit within him. Any other voice or influence that opposed him, tried to distract or use him, was irrelevant to the course he set. He was divine Love Incarnate, the face of God's Mercy, the Servant of the Lord called to fulfill the Law and the Prophets by laying down his life in Jerusalem to break the spell of Evil and defeat the forces of hate and division blocking God's plan of salvation.

Our Lenten journey has reached the halfway point. If prayer, fasting and almsgiving have helped expose our deeper selves, we realize that finding God's will for us requires removing false narratives, secret agendas, hidden motives, desires and fears that obscure our true identity and purpose. God's love is a balm to heal wounds inflicted by doubt and criticism. God's love is also a fire that burns away the lies that have limited our self-knowledge and courage.

The greatest lie is that we are not worthy or too weak or sinful to do God's will. The truth is that God loved us into existence, named and sent us to be a source of life

and goodness to the world. Just as Jesus' own identity burst into his consciousness at his baptism when he heard his *Abba's* voice say, "This is my beloved Son," we must also know how wonderful we are before we have the confidence to become ourselves and complete the mission God has given each one of us.

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