Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away” (Luke 4:30).

2 Kgs. 5:1-15ab; *Lk 4:24-30*

The eloquence of Jesus' inaugural words in Nazareth when he read from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue can make us forget how disastrous that visit to his hometown actually was.

He had already been active in Capernaum, and his reputation preceded him. He was first welcomed as a hero by his relatives and neighbors, who expected him to work miracles for them. But the encounter turned sour when the people who had known him since childhood and thought of him as the carpenter's son began to question Jesus' messianic presumptions and his newfound eloquence.

The scene ends when Jesus works few miracles (Mark's account says he was unable because of their lack of faith), and then reminds them that prophets are accepted everywhere except in their own native place. In today's passage, Jesus rubs in the truth of that adage by recalling that Elijah worked no signs in Israel, but was sent to the widow in Sidon, and that Elisha healed no lepers in Israel, only Naaman the Syrian.

The crowd explodes with indignation and drives Jesus out of the village, even trying to hurl him over a cliff. It was hardly a propitious moment at the start of his public ministry, but it revealed the resistance Jesus would meet from then on. He was to be "a sign of contradiction," as Simeon had foretold 30 years earlier when his parents presented Jesus in the temple (cf. Luke 2).

What Lenten message might we take from this story? If we hope for miracles from Jesus, we are reminded that faith is required and that God decides when and how to give such graces.

But more to the point, we also learn that familiarity lessens our ability to recognize God's graces already present in our ordinary circumstances. Miracles lie just below the surface in our own families and our daily activities, but we only elicit them by being open to God's surprising presence in one another.

We see anew how patience and generosity can turn simple situations into expressions of love and the rediscovery of goodness waiting to show itself. Where criticism shuts people down, praise opens them up. Where pronouncements end an encounter, questions spark new interest. Happiness is found in a smile, a gesture, in small courtesies.

If this seems too simple to be Godlike, today's Word invites us to welcome Jesus again to our native place, glad to just have him with us. Isn't this what discipleship

looks like on an ordinary Monday?