

In my sanctified imagination today: *we heard the story of a hometown boy made good. Jesus thought he was serving his neighbors, the gardeners down his road, and his fellow artisans by organizing the local farmer’s market as a place for fresh organic fruits and vegetables, but also a place where his family’s wooden creations could be seen and purchased. And it had become a place where he could share his beliefs, his thoughts, his ruminations, dare I say prophecies, of what God’s world is or should be. Could he be a prophet without honor! Yes, that was him. You remember Jesus. He was that boy down the street – a little odd, perhaps. Not at all like our children. His Mom, now she was a beauty, and she loved Jesus perhaps a bit too much, don’t you think? And are not his sisters the sweetest and shyest girls in the entire town? How did he become a local prophet? When did that happen?*

*They were a such a quiet unassuming family, working out of the back of their house in the family carpentry shop in this little fishing village. Are not his brothers James and Joses and Judas and Simon? They worked with Joseph every day in the shop just like Jesus, didn’t they? Did the boys that made beautiful things of wood argue points of Torah with Jesus? I think not. Are there Biblical scholars in a carpenter’s shop? I don’t think so. How then did Jesus learn Scripture? How did he become the know-it-all in the synagogue?*

*I have seen that band of his followers – Jesus’s so called disciples – who hang on his every word. Where did he get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power has he done! I hear that he laid hands on a few people in the market square and healed them. I don’t believe any of it! And I’ll tell you what: that Jesus, he scares me to death! His prophecies frightened even his family and best friends, not to mention the others in his home town, people who have known him since he was a young*

*boy. His own, those who supposedly loved him, know him to be a rabble-rouser. He is an embarrassment. And his prophetic voice is a threat to the peace in our little corner of the world. He sacred us! How could we claim who he was?*

We have spent much time talking together about who Jesus was and who Jesus still is to us in this the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let's turn to who we are because of Jesus, because of who Jesus was ... and is today. If we are honest about who we are, we might see that often we are two different people, one person while we are in our homes where we likely learned our Christian values ... and another person in the same skin who lives in the secular world. We are not the only people to live dual lives. Jesus's own neighbours and family had the same problem. They knew this man Jesus who lived in their home and their hometown. They did not know the prophet, the one who taught with authority in the synagogue, the son of God, the one who was doing God's work – his Father's work – out in society. Perhaps it was too uncomfortable, maybe even too dangerous, to allow Jesus back into their hearts and homes when he was drawing so much negative attention in the world outside the security of their home.

In many ways our times are much different than those of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but we too have to make a choice whether to live into the values that are defined at home or those that society defines for us. And society is changing so fast. We have mentioned that we learned at a weeklong congregational growth and development seminar at the end of the last century, that there will be more societal changes in the first 15 years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than there had been in all of the last century. And culture, economics, history, biology, technology—all areas of life – have already experienced serious changes.

The influential Rabbi Hayim Herring, author, intergenerational bridge-builder, and prophet in his own right, suggests that we are living in the “Age of Four A's”: anything, anyone, anytime, anywhere. Driven by the 4 A's we live our daily lives between the first place – our home – and the second place – the world where we work and interact in the “real world.” Anything, well almost anything can be created or modified easily. Anyone

can be an expert even in areas where expertise was assumed conveyed previously only by a degree or credentials (We can be our own stock brokers, publishers, filmmakers, and such – even spiritual leaders.). Anytime, we demand and receive goods and services anytime we want at our convenience. And, anywhere, whether in real or virtual time, we can experience different cultures anywhere given the global society that we live in.

Herrings says, and I concur, that there is good news in living in an age of anything, anyone, anytime, anywhere. The “Four A’s” raise some profound questions for us that we need to address:

- ✎ How do we decide what is really important since we live in a time when we can get whatever we want?
- ✎ How do we exercise wise control over our lives in a world where we have unlimited control?
- ✎ Since we can choose to be a part of any community, which one is most desirable?
- ✎ Because the world is always “on,” how can we disconnect so as not lose our souls?
- ✎ In a world of unlimited power, how do we stay humble, not exploit others, and work to ensure that all people are treated with basic human dignity (or respect the dignity of every human being, as our Baptismal covenant says)?
- ✎ Since we live in a world where we could keep taking, do we have a responsibility to give something back?
- ✎ And there are many more questions just as difficult that we ought to ask ourselves in this time of anything, anyone, anytime, anywhere.

My sisters and brothers, how we answer the hard questions of our lives will tell us a lot about what we truly value. And, if I may play the prophet, we would be well advised to examine how we make decisions in this time of great change. Our values are being tested every day, and we must choose between the values we learn in our homes and those we learn in the secular world or our work in the world. And is there another place – a third place – where our ideals first formed in our homes could and should be forged in to the fabric of our lives forever? Today the corner coffee house – “Two Birds” even more than Starbucks – might be a third place where we, as a community, can gather and talk about principles of society and our own principles. A coffee house setting might be a

safe place where people can connect with each other, where they can recharge, pause, and then reengage the world. But our place of worship can be a third place, distinctive ever so subtly from the first place – our home– and perhaps drastically different from the second place –in the secular world. My friends, we can be the safe third place where people may be allowed to feel strong, positive emotional ties by creating rewarding, meaningful social experiences in a warm community environment.

God sent his only son to reveal God's nature to the people of the 1<sup>st</sup> century because society had evolved to a point where Jesus's message could be heard, not in his own hometown, perhaps, but to the disciples and other followers. The Word has prevailed in spite of all the changes in the last 20 centuries. And the Word can prevail even in our fast paced world where life is being redefined as I speak. Although Jesus's message was not received by his own kin, in his own house, or in his own hometown, he commissioned the twelve to take the Word to the world carrying only a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, and no fresh tunics, no extra sandals or flip flops, no spare beach towel. The disciples were welcomed because they were revealing the word of God to the world through Jesus's life and death and resurrection. Yes, Jesus was a prophet without honor in his own hometown, but his word did spread. We have learned about Jesus's work and the ideals of a Godly life in our own homes and in this third place. Are these ideals still alive in our society today? They are! Do we need to continue to speak of about principles that are worth living for in our time and in the future? Absolutely! In this time of anything, anyone, anytime, anywhere, are we called to be the prophetic word of God by providing a place for the community to gather to ask the hard questions about how we ought to live? Are we called to be a third place? It is my prayer that St. Andrew's may be a place that spreads God's word to the world and by providing a safe place where we can entertain hard questions in our changing times.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.