

There are some statements that people use that immediately cause our radar to note something is coming: “I don’t like to complain, but...” “Not to change the subject, but...” I am sure there are others along these lines but I think you get the gist. These came to mind as I read the Gospel passage for today. Especially as I read verse 22 (The Message); *All who were there, watching and listening, were surprised at how well he spoke. **But** they also said, “Isn’t he Joseph’s son, the one we’ve known since he was a youngster?”*

Jesus is home but, did they know him too well? They were happy to have him back. He was in his usual place in the synagogue and he is asked to read from the Torah. It was his custom to worship with them. The news of him has traveled back to his home town even without Facebook and Twitter. They may have done business with him and his father. He may have gone to school with their children and they played together. Some may even have been his school mates, his pals growing up. They now marvel at how he carries himself, his confidence and his speech; “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” Yet, there is something that we don’t catch that causes Jesus to respond to them in a way that may seem strange.

He gives a brief history lesson. He reminds them of how God moves beyond what they expect. God is concerned for the whole world, for all people. He uses two of the prophets, Elijah and Elisha, and gives an example from each of their ministries of God moving outside the norm. One was to a foreign widow and the other to a representative of a foreign King. Is he trying to open their eyes to the ministry that he is embarking on? Is he trying to open their eyes to the future?

Whatever his motive, it turns them against him. His words cause a commotion. Who is this? Who is he to talk to us like that? A few moments ago they were welcoming him and now they want to drive him out of town. More than that, there are some who want to kill him. This is Joseph’s son. One of their own and they want to throw him off a cliff to his death. Why? They cannot accept his idea that God loves the world. When they are challenged to see God moving outside the box they have put God in, they get upset. They do not want their faith and understanding of God challenged. In thinking about this, I asked myself, “What do I do, how do I feel, when my “faith box” is challenged?”

Jeremiah is called to the role of a prophet as a young man, maybe a teen. God tells him not to let others hold his youth against him. Our son, Chris, had to have an emergency appendix removal. We were in the ER and the doctor had come in and told him the problem and solution. As he left, Chris looked at me and asked, “Is he old enough to be a doctor?” But, the young doctor introduced a new procedure - he would only be in the hospital overnight and could go home the next morning. No long delays in getting back to work. The older surgeons still did things the old way - weeks of recovery. A new way was being introduced.

We like youth as long as they don’t rock the boat, make waves, or challenge what we are doing. We like the steady course, the smooth seas — we like the way it has been. A statement recently went something like, “The music that we used to drive our parents crazy is now being played 24-7 on the Golden Oldies stations.” It is now elevator music. Remember the Beatles used to be radical. We like the status quo. Don’t rock the boat. Don’t make waves. Don’t challenge what I believe.

Prophets seldom brought good news. They came when God was mad. Jeremiah’s words were never appreciated. They did not like his call for repentance, his warnings about exile. He was left to die in an empty well. He was carried off against his will into exile. Even as his

words were being fulfilled they did not want to hear them. Life was not easy being a prophet. No places of honor at the King's table. Yet, God's hand was on Jeremiah - he could not do less than share the "word of the Lord". Even if no one listens.

Those in the synagogue that day with Jesus were comfortable with the status quo. It was the right message but one that the audience was not ready to hear (are we ever?). Jesus says, "look, see what God is about to do." He is moving us in a new direction. But, they liked the idea of "being chosen". We are God's - we are on the inside and we don't want outsiders allowed in. They did not want to be challenged beyond what they already believed. You know, there is still a "flat earth" society. There are still those who deny that man ever landed on the moon, and this past week fifty (50) US senators voted against global warming.

But...God has always worked outside the box we have tried to build. And, when we are challenged about the size of our box, we too, cry NEVER. We know what we know. We know who is paying these guys to misinform us. Why listen when we are right in our own minds? God would never...

Chrystal began her annual report with this sentence, "Our journey continues into a new year. 2016 is a blank slate for us to fill in..." Do you realize how dangerous that statement is? We cannot fill a clean slate unless we are willing to listen to where God is moving us. We need to listen to what God is saying — how God may be moving us outside the box. Maybe we need to rock the boat a little. Yes, they heard what Jesus said, but their response was, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

Is it time to allow God to build our box?

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NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985  
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989