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So, when Maryanne and I are looking for a graphic, something eye-catching for the cover of our programs, we both find ourselves online. And we type in the reference, for example the gospel for this week, Luke 4:21-30, and this is what came up! No Holy Land type pictures, or other things that speak the themes for the week. When I saw this one “Worst Sermon Ever!” I *had* to use it. It was just too good.

Worst!?! Was it? Were Jesus words to his home town crowd the worst sermon ever? You just heard what he had to say to them. Did he deserve to get thrown off a cliff?!? I’ve heard some bad sermons — I’ve probably delivered a few — but... off—a—cliff?!? Well, apparently the hometown crowd thought so.

Apparently, Jesus knew he wasn’t going to be well-received. “Hi! Remember me? I’m the geeky kid who used to live down the block. You remember my Mom, Mary - my Dad, Joseph the carpenter. Well guess what? I’ve been the Messiah all along!” “Surprise!”

And... well... I can’t help it — imagine Deacon Carl, nice guy Carl, coming in here some Sunday to preach and whoaaaa! At the end of his sermon, he announces he’s the messiah — and then we all laugh and go, “Oh that Carl. He’s so funny. What a great sense of humor.” And then we realize he’s serious!!! Talk about awkward...

Eventually it might lead to some frustration... Imagine Ellie in this situation...!

And Jesus' reaction rang so true that his words have come down through history as exemplary of what it means to "go home again." "No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown." Maybe "Familiarity breeds contempt" also applies. We can't accept the extraordinary if its source is too close to us. Maybe we think that nothing familiar can be extraordinary. Or that we can't be extraordinary.

And then people asked Jesus to do the same sort of miracles he did in Capernaum, just up the road. But Jesus told them he couldn't do miracles to order and they were enraged. Just being a nice guy visiting his hometown wasn't good enough for them.

And then he did the most extraordinary thing of all. Just as they got ready to toss him off the cliff, he simply "passed through the midst of them and went on his way." There's a miracle for you! But they never saw it! They couldn't see him. Maybe they were never able to see him.

But God can see us. God can see into our innermost hearts. Paul says that God knew us before we were formed. God planned us before we were even created. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." Think of that! Sometimes I will look at the face of a newborn and see an old soul. Ever have that experience? I truly

believe that newborns carry within them, within their souls, something of the eternity they came from. There is a “knowing” quality to their serious little stares. But then apparently life here on earth just gets to be just too interesting — and that grabs their attention.

Yet one of the first things babies come to know - one of the first things we come to recognize - even in infancy - is love. We may not understand it - but we can recognize it. Is that because we knew love before we were born? Who knows?

Paul’s words about love are often read at weddings, and they are appropriate for weddings. But their meaning goes beyond.

Paul is telling us that eloquence without inner meaning, without heart, without love is just noise. Knowledge and brilliance and even faith without love is nothing. It’s meaningless. Then he describes what love is — patient, kind, totally selfless, no envy, truthful, enduring, believing, hopeful to the point of gullibility. That’s what real love is! It sounds foolish, doesn’t it? It sounds impossible doesn’t it? But real love - it’s not worth it unless we aim for the stars. And that doesn’t mean we’re childish - no - it means we’re hopeful. It means we have high expectations of ourselves and others. We want the best. Where love is concerned, setting the bar high is really the only way. Otherwise why set the bar at all? Why

bother? Being realistic about love is not necessarily advisable or even actually realistic.

But what catches my eye is the point Paul makes near the end of the reading. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face.” That’s two VERY different things. Now we see in a mirror dimly. Now we’re looking at ourselves, only able to see our own faces, our own reflections, only able to see ourselves - and not even very well! Someday we won’t be looking in a mirror. Someday we shall see God, the very person of God — face to face. Now we can only partly know God. That’s all we can withstand. God’s love is so powerful that all we can handle is knowing God in part. But someday we will meet God and know all of God, just as God knows all of us. And knowing God, really knowing God means knowing that God Truly Loves Us — that God truly is love. “Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” Of course it is. God is love.