

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“What did you go out to the desert to see? A prophet? Yes, and more than a prophet.”

Matthew 11: 8

If you had lived back at the time of Jesus in the first century, and you heard about this wild man on the edge of the desert who was calling people to change their lives and be baptized in a baptism of repentance, would you have gone out? And you heard him calling out the King for marrying his brother's former spouse, would you have gone out to have a look? To listen to what he had to say? Would it just have been out of curiosity? Or to be able to hear with your own ears so as to tell the folks back home what you heard? Or to be able to describe this wild man and how he was dressed?

Jesus is asking the Israelites of his day this very question. What did you go out to see? Were you wanting to see a real prophet? Someone who actually spoke for God and brought God's word to the ears of any and all who would listen? Even Kings? Prophet's do not speak words that we like to hear. Prophets speak words that we need to hear whether we like the words or not. And today if we do not like the words, we do not stay around, we go somewhere else.

Many years ago, my earthly father said very succinctly, “Stephen, my boy, people tend to vote with their feet. If the message they hear is not to their liking, they usually stop listening. If they are not able to not hear because they are in church, they stop coming to church. And so, they don't have to hear a message they dislike or disagree with.” There was less of this in the past because people were told pretty frequently that if they did not come to Mass and give God the worship of their hearts and thus keep the very First Commandment, they would not enter into the kingdom. Fear of going to hell was a strong motivator. But as that fear disappeared, so did the willingness to stay and hear a message they sometimes disagreed with, did not make sense to them or they did not like.

We here in the United States have decided that we will hear what we want to hear and not listen to what we do not want to hear. We have decided that we will be the arbiter of the truth of the message. The sense that there is Truth only in God and that we are not to judge this Truth, has been forgotten. Actually, we are to stand beneath it and allow this Truth to call us into question and not the other way around. When Jesus says He is the Way and the Truth and Life he speaks as the incarnate Son of God. It is God's Word. When I say that I am the truth and my way is the way and animates my life—I speak as one created by God and wounded by sin. I speak with an erring heart. There is no humility in my word or my way of thinking. It will not stand. It will not lead me to joy or peace or harmony. It will lead me where I really do not at all want to go but may end up going if I do not change my ways. Can we dare to hear that? The Prophet's word? The question of the week.