

Sermon for Epiphany IV Year C 2019  
*What's Your Plan?*

“What’s your plan for the day?”

That’s a question I often ask my husband.

But sometimes I’ll ask “What’s your plan for this evening?”

They seem like innocent enough questions and usually they are.

I’m really interested in what he wants to do

and what’s going on in his life.

But then there are those other times . . .

times when I ask the question because I already have my own plans,  
my own agenda, and I’m just trying to figure out when and how  
what I want to do will be accomplished.

Will he participate in and support my agenda?

That’s the question behind my question.

When agendas come together amazing things can happen.

Relationships deepen.

Love flourishes.

Energy and creativity flow.

Life is abundant and rich.

All is well.

When, however, agendas collide . . . conflict arises.

Whether spoken or unspoken, we all have our agendas.

We have that list of expectations,

desires,

things we want to do,

and ways we want things to be.

At some level our agendas describe who we are

and what we are about.

The question is not whether we have agendas, we do.

The question is whose agenda guides our life?

I wonder if that’s the question at the heart of today’s gospel.

I wonder if colliding agendas is  
the conflict between Jesus and the people of his hometown.  
I wonder if our own agendas sometimes collide with God's agenda.

If you remember in last week's gospel,  
Jesus came to Nazareth, his hometown, with an agenda:  
to preach good news to the poor,  
release to the captive,  
give sight to the blind,  
freedom for the oppressed,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.  
It was the same agenda and prophecy as the prophet Isaiah's.  
Its fulfillment was happening right in front of them,  
in their hearing.  
At first it all sounded great.  
The people loved it and spoke well of him  
and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

But this week, things are different.  
People start asking, "Isn't this Joseph's son? Mary's boy?"  
They recognize Jesus as one of their own.  
They know him and he knows them.  
They remember him when.  
Hidden within their question, however,  
is an unspoken expectation, an agenda.  
"If that's what he's going to do for them,  
just think how much more he'll do for us."  
Surely, they must have thought,  
if *their boy* was willing to perform miracles for perfect strangers out  
there, then he'll do a hundredfold more back here at home.  
Among his kin, his insiders, his favorites.

The cultural norm and assumption are that Jesus, as the hometown boy,  
will give deference to his own people.  
And why not? They gave him his start.

They helped make him what he is today.  
They helped raise him as a child.  
They expect to not just to be remembered but to be repaid.

It's really not so different today.  
Don't we expect those close to us to support us and to agree with us?  
We often contribute to political campaigns  
expecting to be remembered with a favor now and then.  
We take care of our own before we care for another.  
After all, family—whether by blood, ideology, religion, or economics—  
has to stick together.

But with prophetic insight Jesus unveils their agenda—  
*Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!"*  
*And you will say, "Do here also in your hometown the things we have*  
*heard you did in Capernaum."*  
*And he said, "Truly I tell you,*  
*no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown."*  
And then he reminds them of Elijah being sent not to the widows in  
Israel but a widow at Zarephath in Sidon  
and Elisha being sent to cleanse not the many lepers in Israel  
but to cleanse Naaman the Syrian.

Can't you imagine the people's response?  
Can't you hear them asking, "Why is he telling us the great things God  
did for those outsiders, those foreigners?  
What about us?  
We're the chosen ones!"  
It must have sounded to them as if one of their own had turned on them,  
as if Jesus had betrayed and rejected them.  
That's the kind of talk that gets prophets killed  
and truth tellers stoned.  
When they heard Jesus' words, the gospel writer tells us,  
*they were filled with rage.*  
And they ran him out of town and even tried to throw him off a cliff.  
If you don't like the message, kill the messenger.

Jesus has a vision for his ministry  
and the people have another, different vision.  
The people's own expectations have deafened them  
to the fulfillment of the scriptures.  
They are so caught up in their own agenda they cannot hear,  
let alone participate in, God's agenda.

So what do you think?  
Does this ever happen in today's world?  
In our life together here in this church?  
In our own lives?  
Despite our own agendas, Jesus, as a prophet,  
is guided by the concerns of God,  
God's agenda if you will.  
Jesus will not let himself be co-opted  
by the people of his hometown, Nazareth.

We've all heard the saying, "you can't go home again."  
But actually, Jesus refuses to go home  
in the ways that matter most to his kin.  
He refuses to allow his hometown to define him,  
he refuses to let them set his agenda.  
And everything goes wrong when Jesus essentially says,  
"I am not yours to direct or contain."

Jesus overturns their notions of who God is  
and God's place in their lives.  
God is on the move and God is doing a new thing.  
God is speaking in places you don't recognize as sacred,  
lifting up voices you're not interested in hearing,  
and saying things that will make your ears (and tempers) burn.  
Can you handle it?  
God is not *yours*.  
*You* are his.

If you are making a plan for God . . .  
well God is laughing . . .  
because God has a plan for you and for the whole world.

It's important for us not to think that of Nazareth  
is simply a geographical location, a town in Israel.  
Nazareth is a way of being,  
a way of seeing others,  
and a way of trying to control God.  
Anytime we privilege ourselves over another before God,  
anytime we see our group  
as more deserving than another of God's goodness and grace,  
anytime we feel entitled, to the exclusion of others,  
of God's life and love,  
we are living in Nazareth.  
Jesus will pass through our midst and go on his way.

Jesus broke the bonds of kinship that day in Nazareth,  
not as a rejection of his hometown,  
but as the way of enlarging his hometown.  
No one would be excluded.  
No one would receive special favors.  
No one would be left out.  
All are the recipients of the prophecy's fulfillment.  
That's not always a popular agenda  
and it's not always our agenda,  
but it's always God's agenda.

So, what's your plan for the day?  
That's not me asking this time.  
That's a question God asks each one of us.  
Oh, and don't forget as you're thinking about your answer—  
God's agenda is the still more excellent way of love.  
So, once again, what's your plan?