

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z ... demographers like to talk about the generations. The labels, by the way, are meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive.

But back in 2014, the PBS program “Frontline” added another descriptive label to the generations ... it spanned generations, but probably applied mostly to Millennials then and Gen Z now, to those generations that grew up immersed in the online ether of social media: Twitter and Facebook and Instagram and so forth. Frontline called them “Generation Like” — mostly young people seeking online affirmation in a little “thumbs up” emoji. In social media parlance, that’s a “like,” and the worst possible thing is not to have followers, not to get thousands and thousands of “likes.” These social media users were (and still are) seeking to be popular online — seeking to become famous.

Jesus had become famous in our Gospel today. This hometown guy returned to His hometown of Nazareth in the Gospel, but He was not the same guy as when He left it. He had been baptized; He had heard the sonorous proclamation from heaven: “*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*” (Luke 3:22); He had been anointed with the Holy Spirit; He had emerged victorious in His wilderness battle with the devil (Luke 4:1-13); He had gone forth into the various villages of Galilee, filled with the Spirit’s power, teaching the people, teaching “*in their synagogues, being glorified by all*” (Luke 4:15). Yes, Jesus’ notoriety had spread far and wide: the hometown boy made good. At least, that’s what the people thought as Jesus returned to Nazareth.

Unable to connect to TikTok, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath — that’s what He always did when He entered a town to teach. He didn’t treat His hometown any differently. And they welcomed Him ... at least, at first. They received Him as an honored rabbi. He stood up to read, and they gave Him a scroll. It was the prophet Isaiah. Jesus opened it and turned right to the place that spoke of the work of the Messiah, the anointed One. “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.*”

The congregation surely listened attentively, as the people did in the days of Ezra the priest when “*the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law*” — as, I pray, our ears are as the Scriptures are opened and read in church, especially, the Gospel. Jesus read the Gospel about the Messiah’s work, for that’s what Isaiah prophesied. The Lord anointed this Messiah “*to proclaim good news to the poor*”; God sent this Messiah “*to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*” “This is the Gospel of the Lord,” and He sat down.

It seemed as if Jesus had gotten His “likes” from the people. In fact, Jesus had captivated them. As He sat down to expound on the Word of God just read, *“the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.”*

But Jesus wasn’t sent to receive “likes.” He was sent to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy. He *“began”* to preach to the congregation, but whatever other *“gracious words that were coming from his mouth”* were on that day, these words — *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* — caught all the people’s attention. Jesus didn’t just read that glorious prophecy from Isaiah; He applied it to Himself. He was identifying Himself as that “anointed One”; He was claiming to be the One “sent from God.” And that’s when the people’s attitude began to change.

That’s when those “likes” turned to “dislikes” — “thumbs up” to “thumbs down.” What had begun as admiration turned to outrage. Words of commendation became words of condemnation. We know this guy! He is *“Joseph’s son”* — you can see they didn’t really know Him ... they didn’t know about His miraculous conception and birth. They didn’t know His real Father in heaven. But He did grow up in Nazareth. They would have known Jesus as a boy.

The people rejected Jesus’ self-promotion — true though it was. But Jesus didn’t respond to their rejection with a syrupy attempt at regaining their “likes.” Jesus knew their thoughts and their desire to respond to Him with a proverb: *“Physician, heal yourself.”* “Let’s see some of those acclaimed miracles you’re supposedly doing, but if you can’t, neither will we believe you to be the Messiah. In fact, Jesus, you need some help yourself.” Their response was total rejection.

Jesus upped the ante; He claimed more ... besides claiming to be the Messiah, He took on the mantle of prophet — *“no prophet is acceptable in his hometown”* — comparing His rejection with that of Elijah and of Elisha, for that’s what Israel did: *“they persecuted the prophets”* (Matt. 5:12). Jesus was clearly not a part of “Generation Like,” and to seek the people’s approval here would have meant His own rejection of who else Isaiah foretold Him to be: a servant *“despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; ... one from whom men hide their faces ... despised, and [certainly not] esteemed ...”* (Isaiah 53:3), not “liked.”

Jesus’ latest claim enraged the people more. Their rejection snowballed into mob action. They tried to kill Jesus by throwing Him out of the city, and wanting to toss Him off a cliff.

They weren’t successful. It wasn’t the appointed time yet — you know well. He would be betrayed, and denied, and rejected by men — “we prefer an insurrectionist and a murderer to this man,” the people would say; “give us Barabbas; crucify Jesus.” He would be lifted up on a tree and mocked from there,

also seeking a miracle: “*He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!*” (Luke 23:35)

Yes, that was the time for His ultimate rejection; that was His time to die: “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!*” (Luke 23:46), not this time. That was His time truly to “*set at liberty*” all “*who [were] oppressed*” by sin and death and the accusations of the devil; not this time. That was His time to pass miraculously through a closed tomb to resurrection and life, displaying His victory over our oppressors; but not this time. This time He passed through the mob and departed from Nazareth.

Dear friends in Christ, Jesus’ ministry is not a ministry of trivial “likes.” His is a Gospel ministry: of preaching good news and granting freedom, of healing and lifting up the oppressed, of proclaiming God’s grace. That means it is also a ministry prone to rejection. Jesus was rejected; and we will be, too.

But let not our hearts be discouraged, for the ultimate affirmation, the ultimate “like” is already ours through faith in Christ Jesus. The victory belongs to Jesus, and it belongs to us as a gift through faith. Trust the good news of Jesus. Believe in His grace, in the freedom you have in Christ. Seek His ways. And when the going gets rough, remember Him who endured such hardship and rejection for you, for your eternal salvation. Turn not to the virtual world of “likes,” but look to the real flesh and blood Jesus for His mercy and favor. Look for Jesus among the real flesh and blood of saints gathered in His name. Look for Jesus in the real flesh and blood that He gives in His holy Supper. And look for Jesus in the real flesh and blood “*least of these*” whom you serve. God grant it ...

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.