

The Nazareth crowd turned so ugly a reporter covering the story considers flight. But how can he leave without at least one interview ... so he walks, cautiously, to an older woman. Cautiously, because her face is clenched and she has a rock in her hand.

“Excuse me, ma’am, can you tell me what’s going on, here?” She glares. “You’re not local, are you. Do you have any idea what it’s like to live in Nazareth? Nazareth is an armpit, a hell-hole. You’ve heard our neighbors: Nazareth, Nazareth, can anything good come out of Nazareth.”

“Then comes this ray of hope. Jesus, our Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth. He says the Spirit is upon him and seems on fire with a heavenly mission. When he talks we can’t take our eyes off him. He is somebody. Then when someone asks him to do here the miraculous things he’s done for his new friends in Capernaum ... out comes this stuff about prophets not doing things for their hometown, and Elijah sent only to a widow in Zarephath, and Elisha healing just a Syrian. A Syrian, for God’s sake! He heals ... everywhere but here! Well that’s too much.

“We’d all felt like hurling ourselves off the brow of the hill. Someone says: Let’s throw this ungrateful child of ours off the hill first. I’m sorry, but it just seemed perfect.” A long silence, as our dumbstruck reporter tries to think of the next question.

And then ... it happens. It happens that just as that moment Jesus is passing majestically through the furious crowd. He hears the last part of the conversation, and with such a stricken look on his face places on arm on her shoulder.

“For Nazareth I come to give the best gift of all. To Nazareth I come to declare my mission and start dispensing my product. My mission isn’t to give miracles and healings. My mission is to preach, to expound, and finally to express in my very flesh and gudgeons the perfect love of God.. God is patient, God is kind. God is not jealous, God is not pompous, God is not inflated or rude. God is not quick-tempered nor does God brood over injures.” He sighs. Isn’t this better than a healing or a miracle? God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And finally ... God never fails. Naomi, I am going to model God’s love, perfectly, for you. And then maybe, much later, after the Spirit comes, you will be able to model it to others.”

“Naomi,” he said, looking deep into the old woman’s heart, suddenly standing straight as a board, “God has made me a pillar of iron and a wall of brass. You may fight against me, but you can’t prevail. When God chooses, I will be crushed on your account ... for your good ... to show you, to prove to you, to be for you ... God’s perfect love.

“Don’t seek the trimmings of religion, the icing, the fancy showy stuff. A miracle, a healing ... what’s that? It satisfies for a moment, and then passes ... over and gone. But go after what really lasts. Faith, hope and love. These are enough. Especially, and ultimately, God’s love.

“And one other thing. You may think I care nothing about the humble place God granted me as my first home. But in the future, no one will call me Jesus of Bethlehem, or Jesus of Jerusalem. The whole world will call me Jesus of Nazareth.”