I want to focus today on the message of the second reading…the importance and strength of love. But I don't want to talk about the "easy" kind of love that comes when things aren't difficult; I want to address the difficult love that we must show when we don't want to. I want to talk about the work we are being called to do, with love, when things are tough.

St. Paul talked in the second reading about how love never fails, no matter what, true love never fails. If we bookend that with the messages of the first reading and the gospel, we are told about a fathers "tough love". But we have to keep in mind God's love…pure love. Last week I was walking out to my car during work and I found a card on the windshield that had the letters "WWJD" on it. We all recognize this as "What Would Jesus Do?" but on the card it stood for "Who Will Jesus Destroy"; and then the card went on to list twenty different kinds of people that were destined to be destroyed by Jesus. This isn't the kind of love that I recognize from our Lord, I recognize a pure love, although at times a tough love, that is there at all times and isn't coming from one who wants to destroy people

In today's first reading, Jeremiah receives a mission to be a bearer of a message to his people that they don't want to hear, it's an unpleasant truth regarding their immediate political future and military fortunes. He is to tell the people that the Kingdom of Judah, because of its infidelities, is going to be conquered by the Babylonians and that they should surrender so that their punishment is lenient due to their repentance. Jeremiah is going to face resistance in giving his message but he is reassured by the Lord that no one will prevail against him, in fact, when he gives his message, he was imprisoned, branded a traitor and threatened with death. But in the end, Babylon did conquer Judah and there was significantly more suffering than there would have been otherwise. The turning away from the Lord resulted in their defeat and although the Lord wanted so much for them to embrace the hard truth, the people just didn't love Him enough to trust Him.

Then in today's Gospel, Our Lord probably had Jeremiah's from the first reading in mind when he said a prophet was without honor in his own country. He's talking to friends and people he's known and they wanted to see a show, they didn't want the truth. They expected miracles that they didn't deserve…they felt they were entitled to a miracle. Instead, what they got was Jesus telling them about the times that the Lord withheld his favor from a stubborn and unfaithful people. His own neighbors show how superficial their love is but His love never diminishes a bit. He's telling them what they need to hear, not necessarily what they want to hear. Unfortunately, they loved the thought of what the Lord could do for them, they didn't love Him, and therefore they went from speaking highly of Him to trying to toss him off a cliff.

So as always, we need to reflect on what this means to us. As we've heard over the past several weeks, we are constantly being called to be priests, prophets and kings. We are being called to be the best versions of ourselves and help others be their best version…even if it means being vocal and telling people what they don't want to hear, what we may not want to say because it is uncomfortable to us. Think about the recent abortion laws that have been passed in Virginia and New York. This is an example of the kinds of things that we should be vocal about, even though it may be uncomfortable for people to hear and for us to bring up. We are Catholics, we must work through our discomfort and become better proclaimers of our Lord's message. We must find inspiration in those around us who are better than we are at doing so. There are so many in our very parish who can be and are an inspiration. Take the opportunity to learn from them, to learn from our Church not only what and who we are, but how we are to be. We have to be strong and do this, knowing that it may be difficult. We have to go forward, inspired by what we heard today…that although people may fight against us, they will not prevail and that our love and the love of God is the greatest of all things. Don't take from these readings the negative aspects that may first stand out when we hear it, that Jeremiah had difficulties or that some wanted to throw Jesus from a cliff. Instead, look at it as inspiration and direction on what happens when we follow the teachings of our Lord. We can show others the love in our hearts by how we conduct ourselves and the love of our Lord by spreading His message. As we continue into our learning of Jesus's work, let's not only learn it by hearing about it, let's learn by doing. Now is the time for love…now is the time for action.

Deacon Corey Compton, 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 3, 2019