

## Bible Tuesday for Epiphany 4, 2019

### Jeremiah 4:1-10

4 Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." 6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." 7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." 9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Many of the books of the prophets have a passage in them near the beginning of the book where the prophet is called by God. Isaiah 6 from where we get the hymn, "I the Lord of Sea and Sky/Here I am Lord." Hosea's "I am a dresser of sycamore trees..." The above passage is Jeremiah's call. Note that Jeremiah is a "youth" when God calls him. Jeremiah is called to proclaim to the people and power that be of Jerusalem that God is wounded by their complete lack of faithfulness. This call sounds very similar to the call of Moses at the burning bush. After God tells Moses he is to demand from Pharaoh to release the enslaved Israelites, Moses begs off saying, "I cannot speak well" which is a colloquialism for "I stammer".

God squelches Jeremiah's protests and instead appoints this boy over the both the northern and southern kingdoms and the surrounding nations. However, this appointment does not mean any wealth or luxury, merely that in God's eyes, Jeremiah is righteous and these peoples and governments are not. God sends Jeremiah as his tool to depose the sinfully powerful and to grant comfort to the afflicted; never a comfortable or cushy job.

Can you imagine being in junior high/early high school and being called by God to march into the state capitol and proclaim to the legislators that they are sinning and disgusting God? Such was Jeremiah's call, and it was very difficult for him. Jeremiah was despised and rejected. When Jerusalem finally did fall to Babylonia, Jeremiah was among the Israelites who fled to Egypt instead of being taken captive.

### Psalms 71:1-6

1 In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame.

The psalmist begs for protection, not from physical harm or even death, but shame. Family honor and reputation was far more important than wealth or physical comfort in Jesus' day. Physical health was associated with honor. If you became seriously ill, it was a sign that you had sinned and God was punishing you.

2 In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me.

"Righteousness" in this case refers to God's completeness and perfection. Because God is righteous and therefore faithful to the covenant He made with Israel, the psalmist asks that

God rescue him in line with fulfilling that same covenant. Here is one of hundreds of examples of “double statement” (my label) in the Hebrew Scriptures. “Incline your ear to me and save me” is a restatement of the first part of this verse, “deliver me and rescue me.” As it is a pet peeve of mine that people repeat themselves in the same sentence, I think I would have made a terrible ancient Israelite!

3 Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.  
4 Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. 5 For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. 6 Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you. It is a common assertion in the Hebrew Scriptures that God knows us in utero, “knit me together in my mother’s womb”, and drew us out of the womb for His purpose. In this case, the psalmist lays claim to this belief in order to leverage it for God’s protection. “Since I am one of your children, one who sings your praises all the time, could you please protect me and shore up my honor?”

This psalm sounds like Jeremiah wrote it!

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

This very famous passage which is read at 90% of church weddings is actually one of the first ever Christian hymns. Because of the meter and vocabulary choices apparent in Greek, it is obvious to scholars that St. Paul is quoting a very early hymn. How very differently this hymn speaks about love than modern love songs. Our love songs talk of how we feel when we feel love. This hymn talks about the nature and qualities of love, inspiring us to embody love.

St. Paul uses this hymn to temper his discussion of spiritual gifts. We receive gifts from the Holy Spirit which the Corinthians were using and abusing. Paul talked to them about spiritual gifts and admonished the congregation in Corinth to use these gifts, not to show off God's favor in giving the gifts to them, but to build up the congregation and the church.

Paul said (my paraphrase), "The purpose of these spiritual gifts is to embody and convey God's love. And what does God's love look like? Let's use this hymn to explore that."

Tongues of humans and angels – Paul is putting the gift of speaking in tongues in perspective. The gift is worthless without God's love backing it up.

Prophetic powers...understand all wisdom and knowledge – Paul states that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are "Wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord, joy in God's presence." In this verse, Paul is putting the gifts of prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge in perspective. If one prophesying is not to lovingly tell God's truth, if one's knowledge is not used to lovingly, compassionately build up the children of God, then they are impediments, not blessings.

All faith to move mountains – even faith, faith in God and in humanity and all creation, is made real with love. Faith in God is activated by love of God for how can we have trust and hope in someone we do not love?

Give up my body to be burned – Even self sacrifice is worthless if it does not embody and convey love.

The hymn goes on to list the qualities of love. None of these are feelings, emotions. Rather, they are behaviors. In Paul's writing, love is a decision we make, not a feeling we foster. It doesn't matter whether or not a person likes another or is attracted to another. One person loving another is a decision to be compassionate, empathetic, helpful, prayer, respectful, all in the name of Jesus.

Luke 4:21-30

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" 23 He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" 24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the

hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

One of the cool things I learned when taking Greek is that Greek has an extra tense that English doesn't have. It is the perfect tense. Okay, English does have that tense but it is way different in Greek than in English. In English, the perfect tense is used to describe an event that happened and is now over. In Greek, the perfect tense is reserved to describe those things which have happened and continue to happen even to this day. That aspect of Greek is impossible to easily translate into English so it generally isn't.

This is the case with the first verse of this text. Jesus just read the Isaiah passage (last week's gospel) to his hometown synagogue, handed the scroll back to the assistant minister, and then sat down to preach. He opened his sermon with, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Which could more accurately be translated, "Today, in your hearing, this is being fulfilled and henceforth will continue to be fulfilled." The fulfillment started with Jesus in Galilee and continues and continues and continues...

Physician, heal thyself – Jesus uses this saying as an explicit statement of the implicit thoughts of the congregation. "You all are expecting me to heal my home town crowds just as I have been doing in the little towns around the Sea of Galilee."

A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own people – "Because you watched me grow up, you think you know me, and in that concept, you think you have some control over me. However, that thinking limits your perception of what God can and is doing among you. Your small thinking about me curtails the power I have among you. Your lack of faith is your own undoing."

Jesus uses the examples of Elijah and Elisha to say that while there were needs among the Israelites, God sent these great prophets of old to non-Israelites because their willingness to cooperate with God was greater. While Jesus checks in at home, the unwillingness of the hometown crowd to see Jesus as more than just Joseph and Mary's rabbi son prevents them from receiving "the Kingdom of Heaven drawing near." The inauguration of the prophetic fulfillment is in their hearing, but it will carry on elsewhere.