

Scripture Readings and Sermon

January 30, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Luke 4:21-30

Jesus' harsh rebuke on the surface appears disproportionate to the response "Is not this Joseph's son?" Jesus puts words in their mouths and then condemns them for not accepting him as a prophet. There appears to be more going on than just "All spoke well and were amazed". It is from other passages in Luke that we receive a hint at what might have prompted Jesus' response. In Luke 5:22, after telling the paralytic that his sins are forgiven, Luke writes "When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?'" Later, in Luke 20:23, when they test Jesus about paying taxes, Luke writes, "But he perceived their craftiness". Both of these passages remind us of Jesus' divinity for just as God looked upon the heart of David (1 Samuel 16:7), Jesus perceived what was in the heart of his audience. The off handed comment about Jesus being Joseph's son revealed a hardness of heart to which Jesus reacted. It is curious whether this hardness of heart was due to Jesus being a local boy or the "rumors" around his unconventional birth. Whatever the cause, Jesus' words convicted them to such a degree that they were ready to kill him.

Luke 4:30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Have you ever tried to explain something that "went over their head"?

Was it because they did not understand or because they didn't care?

Did you try to force the issue only to hit a brick wall?

How must God feel speaking to us sometimes?

When the people refused to be open, what did Jesus do?

Have you ever had Jesus pass through your midst because you closed your heart?

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

After speaking of the power of the Holy Spirit to not only bind us together as one but also to empower us to do the work of God, Paul says that there is a more excellent way. Paul places the Body of Christ under one authority, God's love. If God so loved the world that we received Jesus, than Jesus so loved the world that he sent us to embody that love. We are formed as one Body not to do miracles or champion some social cause but to do God's will. As Jesus did, we are to continually state "Not my will but thy will". That will is to love as God loves, as Jesus loved, and as the Holy Spirit inspires us to love today. This chapter, known as the "Love Chapter", is often read at weddings to inspire couples to love each other selflessly. We are only able to fully understand the type of love described in this passage when we experience that love from God. In the light of divine love, all our attempts to love seem self serving and diminished. With the help of the Holy Spirit, however, we have been given the grace to let God's love flow through us and our lives.

1 Corinthians 13:3 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.

What does God require of us?

Is it enough just to give an offering or spend an hour on Sunday?

Is it enough just to volunteer at a food pantry or service project?

Is it enough to study the bible and say prayers in public?

Without love, do any of these things matter?

With love, wouldn't you want to do all of these and more?

Commentary on Jeremiah 1:4-10

When does life begin? This question has been at the center of the abortion debate for years. The debate, however, focuses strictly on the material and not the spiritual reality of our existence. In Jeremiah's call, the LORD says that "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you". That is to say, before you were material, you were a spiritual being which could be known by God. Another interpretation could be that God planned that there would always be a "jeremiah" before there was a human named Jeremiah. While this interpretation fits into some theological understanding of predestination, it minimizes the powerfully intimate statement of Jeremiah 1:5. By interpreting the passage as referring to our spiritual soul or self, the passage affirms that before our physical and after our physical life there is never a time we are not known by God. Not just known but loved. This is not only a power affirmation for the young boy, Jeremiah but for us all. The passage ends with the powerful statement that Jeremiah will be able to destroy or build but the power does not reside in Jeremiah. The power resides in the fact that "I am with you, says the LORD" and it is the "words" from God that have the power. A prophet is simply a conduit through which the power of God is encountered. God knows who you are and what you are capable of because God is the one who gives us all of our gifts and talents. These gifts and talents are given to the world through you. When we grow into who we were meant to be, the entire creation is greater because of it. It is not age or maturity that gives us these gifts but God which is why the Lord said, "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." When we use God's gifts for the glory of God, it is God who empowers those gifts to do the Lord's wonders. The power of God can build up or destroy. All we have to do is have faith in the gifts God has already given us and seek the Spirit's guidance on when and how to use them for God's glory.

Jeremiah 1:7 "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.

When have you used age as an excuse? Too young ... too old?

What other excuses have you heard someone use?

If it is totally dependent upon us, will we ever be enough?

Where does our strength and knowledge truly come from?

If God calls, will not God equip?

If we truly believe that God's grace and strength is sufficient, why do we say no?

Reflection on Jeremiah 1:4-10, Luke 4:21-30, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Sermon "Known by Love"

When Jesus spoke in Nazareth, they failed to hear his words because they knew about him. They knew his parents and probably remembered the boy who grew up in the town. A boy whose birth was questionable and whose parents had to go into exile in Egypt for several years. While it is never fair to judge someone without first getting to know them personally, small towns have a habit of making assumptions based on reputation and appearances. Nazareth is no different and their reaction was probably not a surprise to Jesus. What was a surprise was Jesus' harsh critique of their closed mindedness and hard heartedness. The people were so taken aback by his critique that it created a lynch mob. The only problem was that they were so blind to who Jesus truly was that he simply walked past them.

Just as Jesus' message of hope and redemption was met with closed hearts and minds because their assumptions, Jeremiah originally rejects God's call because he assumes he is too young. We all have images of what type of people fit certain roles. While these images can encourage some to strive to be better, they can also prevent some from even trying. Gender, race, and age all play a part to varying degrees in the creation of these images for certain roles. God, however, does not care about our human stereotypes. God calls and God equips whom God has made for the role in God's kingdom.

The authority of God's word is not based on age or lineage but rather on the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is through God's grace and power that words become prophecy to ears that will hear. Just as Jesus was rejected so will many of those who would hear Jeremiah's words. Their rejection, however, did not make Jeremiah's words any less true or powerful. Just as Nazareth did not stop Jesus proclamation of the good news, age would not stop Jeremiah for proclaiming God's word. Jeremiah and Jesus were perfect instruments to carry out the Father's will on Earth. Jeremiah proclaimed the word and Jesus was and is the Word. Each formed for the wondrous purpose of redemption and restoration. We too were formed by God for a purpose. Age, gender, or race does not change that purpose. When God calls, we are never too young or too old. When we are called, we are who God wants at that time with all of our flaws and issues. Unlike small towns or social stereotypes, God knows our hearts fully and has consecrated us for God's purpose.

God calls us all to be instruments of God's perfect love. This perfect love described in Paul was often associated with gender roles in the past. My father taught me that a gentleman was patient and always kind. A gentleman was never rude or arrogant insisting on their own way but rather defended the truth and confronted wrongdoing. A true gentleman helped others before themselves whether that was opening a door or making sure that no one was left behind. In other words, my father taught that a true gentleman let the light of God's love shine out in every aspect of their life. To be a Christian was to be a gentleman. These same traits have also been used to describe a beloved mother or grandmother. The fact is that love transcends gender roles for God is love as John states. When we are in the presence of that love, we feel secure enough to open up and be known. When we are the ones who loving sit with someone patiently and with kindness, then we begin to know them more fully. How different might the exchange in Nazareth could have been if they listen to Jesus with love rather than judgment? What would happen if we practiced this love more than we practice judgment? God calls us to love for it is love more than hope or faith which binds us together as the family of God.