

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Jeremiah 1:4-10

^{1:4} 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."

Commentary

Call narratives, common throughout the ancient world, verified that an encounter with a deity had occurred and legitimized the prophet's authority every time a message from the god was delivered. Jeremiah's call narrative describes such a dialogue that moves from YHWH's commissioning him, to Jeremiah's objection, to God's reassurance, to the offering of a sign of support and presence. This pattern is like the call of Moses (Exodus 3), Gideon (Judges 6), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6), and links Jeremiah to these great leaders from the past. In these verses, "Word of the Lord" makes clear that his message comes from God, "Knew" suggests an intimate relationship, "only a boy" implies inexperience (which God's power will overcome), "touched my mouth" denotes God's direct inspiration of his prophetic ministry. Jeremiah's prophetic activity spanned a very volatile political time in Judah's existence (627-587 BCE). Through it all, he preached that God's judgment was occurring through political events. When Jerusalem fell, he told survivors that God wanted them to stay on the land, accept their punishment, and not flee to Egypt. Although Jeremiah preached destruction and judgment, his call says he was also "to build and to plant"—which refers to the restoration of Jerusalem after the exile. The resulting account of his life is a story containing both dire predictions and hopeful promises.

Reflection

What do we mean today when we see that someone is called to ministry? If you have experienced God's call upon your life in some way, share that story.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

^{13:1} 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.

Commentary

The famous love chapter is part of Paul's larger discussion about knowledge and spiritual gifts. Paul opposed some Corinthian's claims that because they "know" about the one God, they could eat meat from pagan rituals. He told them that having knowledge only inflated their egos; they must love God and must be known by God, which was alluded to in previous parts of the letter. They can exhibit any number of spiritual gifts—but if they do not have *agape* (self-giving, other-regarding love) like the love of God to us, they have nothing and are nothing. Paul concluded that prophecies, tongues and knowledge (about which the Corinthians had been making inflated claims) are limited, partial, and childish—they are dim, distorted images like ones you would find in the more primitive mirrors of polished bronze or silver that were made in Corinth during that time. What is permanent is love. He shifted the Corinthian's focus from the spiritual gift of knowledge that some of them had received to the more profound and universal knowing of God in relationship.

Reflection

Paul cautioned the Corinthians not to rank spiritual gifts and inflate themselves but rather to manifest God's love in our relationships. What do we need to work on to be more loving?

Luke 4:21-30

^{4:21} 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.

Commentary

Our story continues from last week where Jesus read portions of the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue of Nazareth where he grew up. Israel had been waiting for centuries for the scriptural promise of an Anointed One who would bring peace, prosperity and justice. At first, they praised Jesus, just as people did from other parts of Galilee. They marveled that Joseph's boy had become a prophet! They might have thought that Jesus would favor His hometown with His mightiest works and they would share in his fame. No longer could people say (however wrongly) that no prophet ever came from Galilee. The Pharisees' consideration of those from Galilee being unlearned and misguided was being broken down before their eyes. The religious identity of the people of Nazareth was founded on the belief that they were God's special people with whom God made an exclusive covenant. Expectations of privilege were ingrained, and that sense of reality was reinforced because this community was surrounded by Gentile neighbors. They sought to maintain their identity, so you can imagine their expectation: Surely Jesus would bless hometown folks—Jews, rather than the Gentiles—in greater abundance. The indictment of their expectation was too much for Nazareth. The inclusiveness of Jesus' prophecy, however, did come true. As Luke tells the story, and it continues in Acts, disciples like Peter, Paul and others turned to Gentiles to share God's love and grace.

Reflection

The people of Nazareth expected God's blessings to be meant exclusively for them; Jesus proclaimed God's grace for all. Do you feel entitled to special benefits from God because of your Christian faith? Why or why not, and what resources (from scripture or from life) have helped you come to that understanding?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 71:1-6

- ^{71:1} In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
- ² **In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.**
- 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.**

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**