

The prophet Jeremiah saw Israel morally disintegrating, overthrown by the Babylonian empire, and its people exiled in 586 BC. Jeremiah's prophecies were often grim, warning Judah about God's approaching judgment because of the people's constant, willful disobedience. Yet within the dark messages were also words of hope about Judah's future redemption.

This passage tells of Jeremiah's call from God, his resistance, acceptance and empowerment.

¹The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ²to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

⁴Now 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.”

⁶Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”

⁷But 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. ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.”

⁹Then 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. ¹⁰See, 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.”

Luke 4:21-30

This passage is a continuation from last week's reading when Jesus claims his role as God's anointed. Here we see the people's reaction as Jesus' understanding of God's Messiah sinks in. Jesus undercuts their assumptions of familiarity and privilege, and provokes their outrage.

²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph's son?” ²³He 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.’” ²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in their hometown. ²⁵But 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; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They 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. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Special Music

“Just a Closer Walk with Thee”

traditional. Arr. Phillip Keveren

Here is a truth I think we all will agree on, and we all have experienced. People don't always do what you want them to do. It starts when they're young, as soon as they learn the magical word no, and it continues right to the grave. It also goes both ways. Parents want their kids to clean their room. The kids want a puppy. Parents don't want you do date until, oh, say 30. Kids want to borrow the car Friday night. Parents want their kids to go to college. The kid joins the military instead. It is so common, in every part of life, that you can just say 'where two or three are gathered in my name, there's bound to be a struggle.'

Today in Scripture we see Jesus confronting that same struggle. He has come home to let everyone know he has experienced a life-changing event, one that has set him on the path of living as God's Anointed One. This indeed seems like good news to the hometown folks. He is the son of Joseph. He grew up with their kids and played in their yards. They are impressed by his sermon and they've heard all about his great work in Capernaum. Now he has come home. And He is Ours.

Jesus, wisely or unwisely, sees and understands the attitude, but he is not going to have it. He states point blank what they are hoping for. 'Doc, take care of your own. What you did in Capernaum you can do right here, for us.' (And by the way, the nominating committee is eager to meet you.) And there is the rub. Jesus cannot follow the path this good congregation wants to lay on him. After all, he had just announced that God has called him to bring in the kingdom, to extend God's favor to all people.

I wonder if they got it. I wonder if they heard a subtle 'Sorry, but no' in his words. I wonder if they were disappointed in his attitude and annoyed at his hutzpah. This was not going the way they liked. Then, just in case they didn't get it, Jesus presses it further. 'No prophet is acceptable in his own hometown.' And he tells them two stories of God's servants who helped those who were not 'one of us'. The prophet Elijah, who moved out of Israel during a famine, and helped a widow in the region Sidon, a Phoenician stronghold that had a long history of conflict with Israel. And in the days of Elisha the prophet with all the lepers in Israel he only healed their oppressor, the Syrian general, Namaan.

OW, those words certainly hurt! Jesus laid it out to them in black and blue. He pulls them up short because they need to see, not just who he claims to be, but the much bigger picture of who God is. They think 'the Lord is our God, and we are his people', – exclusively. We and we alone should get his blessings. But not to Jesus. God is God for all people, whether you are a prophet, or a poor widow, a servant of Israel, or a foreigner oppressor. And God will be merciful and gracious to anyone, because that is who God is.

The people, as you can right well see, we so upset with Jesus that they wanted to kill him, they tried to kill him. That's some anger! But Jesus just moves on. And his ministry, thank God, continued as it must. It led him to people like Peter and Lazarus, a paralytic, and a blind beggar. And it led him to Pilate's court and a borrowed tomb.

It is a powerful story; but it leaves us, this congregation, in a very awkward place. We are the people of God; really, we are! And we are trying our best. But the reality is - it's hard sometimes to hear God's truth, and even harder to follow it, because it can disrupt not just our plans, but everything we assume to be right. Who doesn't want God to 'do amazing things here', and recreate

what the church was decades ago. Even I would like that – and I wasn't here! And yet, it seems, like Jesus, God's Spirit is on the move, going places we don't expect, and doing things we only hear about. We would rather God follow our plan, when God is calling us to a discipleship that moves beyond our comfort zone.

My brothers and sisters, it takes courage and trust to let God be God, to let God shape us as God will shape us, and use us and God will use us. It takes a boldness we may not always feel. It takes hope in a future we cannot readily see. It may lead us into unknown territory (I can guarantee you that.) It may lead us away from our desires and plans. (But we are the followers of Christ- not the other way around.) It may lead us into a path that looks for all the world like a cross, (Which is the way Jesus went, is it not?)

But this- this is God's way. It is the way Jesus went, and it is a way that God has promised will lead to fulness of life for all people, not just us. It may just lead to the kingdom of God on earth, even right in our corner of Northfield.

Is it a truth we are willing to bear?

Amen.

***Hymn**

O Young and Fearless Prophet

insert vs 1.5

Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People

Loving God, we thank you for your unending faithfulness and goodness to us, and to all people. We thank you Jesus Christ, who pursued your will with passion and shared your grace with abandon. We thank you for your Spirit who reveals your truth to us and challenges us to genuinely walk in your way. We are here, O God, seeking to live as your true people, and so we ask for your guidance and strength.

We pray for your church and for this congregation. May your truth be spoken and heeded, your grace accepted and embodied. And most especially, may we follow your lead and grow in your holy purpose, for the blessing of the world. We pray for all our leaders. Help them to hear the hard messages that confront them, and open them to your true ways of justice and peace for all people. We pray also for all who are suffering today. Grant your healing to the ill, your comfort to the sorrowful, and your aid to the needy. We lift up.... and we thank you for....

We praise you, Faithful God, for the depth of your love, mercy and grace to all the world, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Choral Response

Remember Me

Offering

God has called the church to be his agent of grace. With prophetic voice and courageous work, we are to influence the world. The gift of self and substance we offer is our sign of answering God's call. Let us dedicate our gifts with joy.

With courage and hope we offer ourselves as servants of your reign, O God. Empower in us those gifts that reflect the truth of Christ, the power of grace, and the depth of your care through the ministries you have entrusted to us. Amen.

Doxology (choose the one that is best for your faith)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below,
praise him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God for all that Love has done; Creator, Christ and Spirit One. Amen

***Hymn** O Jesus I Have Promised NCH 493

*Common Commission

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Benediction

Go now into the world.

...entrusted to God's loving care and to the word of God's grace.
This will strengthen you and give you a rich heritage among all who
are set apart for God's holy purposes. Acts 20:32

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude "Thou Art. Worthy" Pauline Michael Mills. Arr. Fred Bock

music provided by Chris Harris and Lynne Walker