

Scripture Readings and Sermon

February 3, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Jeremiah 1:4-10 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

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.

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

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.

Commentary on Luke 4:21-30 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

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.

Sermon Summary (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

On the surface, Jesus seems to respond fairly harshly to the comment "Is not this Joseph's son?" Luke even says that "All spoke well of him". Jesus, however, perceived what was in their hearts. Jesus saw their doubts and the small town gossip that must have spread about his unconventional birth. The scripture Jesus referenced struck at the heart of their hypocrisy and drove them into a rage fueled by guilt. The Word of God has the power to both build up and tear down.

Jeremiah felt that he was too young for God to use him but God reminded Jeremiah that the power rests not in the person but in the Word of God. God saw into Jeremiah's heart and knew him before he was even formed in the womb. We may try to hide our true selves from others but God knows us for who we are inside. Just as God chosen Jeremiah, the Holy Spirit was with Jesus and the power of the word, which had healed so many, had laid bare the malice in the hearts of those in Nazareth.

Rage is often the response when hatred and malice encounter pure love. Love that is neither boastful or arrogant. There is no need to be rude or impatient because there is a deep strength in pure love. This is the more excellent way that Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to follow. Gifts of the Spirit demonstrate the power of God and with the unity of the Body nothing is impossible, but if love is missing then nothing matters. It is for love that Jesus Christ came into the world. It is to love that the Old Testament commandments point and Jesus tells us to show as disciples. It is in love that God will walk with us all of our days and it is because of love that Jesus did not condemn those who rejected him but instead he simply walked away.