

Good morning!

Ushers for next week, February 7, are: Mary Jane Field and Bill Glendinning, Jr.

Yesterday we lit the memorial candle for Arthur Dexter, Tommy Farrin, and Kevin F.
We held in prayer: Janet Claar, Barbara Hamlin, Maude Olsen, Jean and Bill Turner, Earl Wright

The Bell Choir met for its practice after the service! And it was fun! Carolyn said it was 'probably the best first rehearsal ever!'

Next Sunday is Souper Bowl Sunday-most of us don't have a favorite in the game:(So we will mark it in another way. Bring a can of soup for the Food Pantry!

Wednesday, February 10 at 4:30- Ash Wednesday Service at Union Church with participation of the other Pemaquid Peninsula Churches.

Saturday, Feb. 13 at 5:30 is the Church Supper. Bring a main dish or salad and come join us! Desserts and drinks will be provided by the Hospitality Committee. All donations will be to support Ronnie House.

Sunday, February 14-Deacons' Gifts of Love Sunday

HEBREW SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 1:4-10-Jeremiah's name means "the Lord hurls." Michelangelo painted him on the ceiling of the Sistene Chapel as a man of great strength and sorrow-the weeping prophet. Jeremiah preached a religion of the heart and called for repentance and an ethical lifestyle. He was a prophet for forty years until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC He was a colorful and courageous prophet who held out the hope of a new covenant.

EPISTLE 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 Now more than ever, the Christian community needs to shine the light of Christ's unconditional agape to a world in darkness. But how can the church accomplish this mission if it is divided against itself? This was the case in the church in Corinth. Debates and controversies ripped apart those who claimed to be followers of Christ. In this morning's reading, Paul writes to remind them of the most important quality missing in that family of faith: love.

GOSPEL READING Luke 4:21-30

Hear God's word-the word of call, the words of promise, the words of faith, the words of hope, the words of love. Live God's word-the words of life.

MESSAGE

God's Odd Choices

Pastor Beth Hood

Flash back to six hundred years before our reading from Jeremiah this morning. Terrified by the sight of God's fiery presence at Sinai and afraid they cannot survive the sound of God's voice, the Israelites ask for prophets who will protect them and speak God's word to them.

Isaiah was one of the few, if not the only one who said, "Here I am! Take me!"

God found Gideon hiding in a winepress. Israel was being oppressed by the Midianites, a Bedouin people who supported themselves by raiding others. When the Israelites were ready to harvest their grain the Midianites would swoop in on their camels and steal it. Normally you threshed grain at a high, flat, windy place. But because Gideon didn't want to be seen he was hunkered down in a pit where they crushed grapes.

God found Daniel in the lions' den betrayed by jealous rivals. Joseph was in a prison. Moses was a murderer and God found him in the fields. Moses was called by Yahweh out of the persistent flames of a bush. These were all common men, all doubted their own abilities. All were told by God, "I will be with you."

Jeremiah was raised in a retired preacher's home in Anathoth, a small village in the central highlands of Israel. He was raised around priests, their conversation, and their actions. Nothing can inspire you, but also make you question 'who you think you are' like sitting and listening to other pastors!

Just like the great Moses, whose name would have been common on the lips of the priests of Anathoth, Jeremiah heard God's call most reluctantly. "Ah, YHWH God. I certainly do not know how to speak, because I am only a boy." Moses, called by YHWH out of the flames, responded, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; I am slow of both speech and tongue."

Jeremiah, like Moses, like me, was a reluctant conscript to the Lord's service. He considered himself too young and inexperienced to become a prophet. Jeremiah was hesitant, but the call of God was insistent. Little is much when God is in it. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus promised, 'the Spirit will speak through us.'

Jeremiah's story of God's calling him as a prophet echoes the story of Moses' commission to lead the Israelite slaves from Egypt to Exodus.

God's fortunate rescue of Moses as an infant eighty years before preceded his commission. God likewise refers here to Jeremiah's prenatal calling. Like Moses, whose many objections include his own ineloquence, Jeremiah protests that he does not know how to speak.

As with Moses, God does most of the talking, describing sending Jeremiah and giving him words to speak, though not yet mentioning that, like Moses, Jeremiah would be addressing rulers. Like Moses, Jeremiah is appointed the task of nation building. Foreign oppressors figure prominently in the stories of both men. Moses' God fought the Egyptians to free the Israelites. In Jeremiah's time, God used the Babylonians as tools in a conflict with the Israelites, themselves. Both men's callings served to bring their nation to a better place.

Jeremiah's calling echoes the story line of Moses, and is in turn echoed by that of Jesus. To speak prophetically is to follow God into a calling one would not necessarily have chosen, saying and doing things that anger one's own neighbors. No wonder Moses and Jeremiah hesitated!

This passage about Jeremiah accompanies the story of Jesus' own announcement of his ministry in Nazareth, and of his near escape from the hands of townspeople. Like Jeremiah, Jesus is understood as a prophet. Like Jeremiah, he is questioned and rejected by his own people, who attempt to kill him, though he survives to continue preaching. Like Jeremiah, Jesus gets into trouble over foreigners.

The end of last week's Gospel reading is the beginning of this week's. "The he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,'"

But the promise of fulfillment from Jesus is not just today, in this moment, nor is it temporary or fleeting. Rather, that Isaiah's words have been fulfilled in our hearing has indeed happened and the effect of that hearing is ongoing. What difference does this make? It brings us into the never-ending reality of how scripture is being fulfilled and invites us into making God's reality possible. Our hearing plays a part in the promise of Isaiah's words. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to

comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.”

That is, we are in the midst of, in the presence of, and participating in proclaiming release to the captives, seeing to the recovery of sight to the blind, setting the oppressed free, and witnessing to the moment of the Lord’s favor. This is no small invitation at the end of the season of Epiphany. We are asked to carry Epiphany into the dim, even dark months that are the season of Lent. We are asked to take seriously that we have a part in making the year of God’s favor a reality.

Jesus’ whole ministry will be for the least of these, over and over again. Jesus is for everyone. Both Elijah and Elisha took God into places where God was not thought to be and had no business being there—to the widow at Zarephath and the leper Naaman, the Syrian—the widows, the lepers, the outsiders. It is these words of inclusion, Jesus’ own interpretation of his ministry, the real reason for God in a manger, that bring about a very quick transition from awe to rage for the hearers of Jesus’ words.

The description of Jesus as prophet, along with Jesus’ reference to past prophets in Israel’s history, is a primary category through which Luke presents Jesus. Jesus is a righteous and innocent prophet as will be made clear by the centurion’s words at the death of Jesus—‘surely, this man was innocent.’ Remembering the role of the Old Testament prophets is important for this passage. Prophecy is not about predicting the future, unless it means saying the future is secure in God.

Rather, prophets tell the truth about the present and give hope to God’s presence. Jesus’ sermon in Nazareth is a prophetic message. Jesus tells the truth about the realities of our world, where the lowly are looked down upon, where the poor sleep in cardboard boxes under freeways, where the captives remain in their prisons, where the rich live full lives. But reading or hearing between the lines, Jesus announces that God’s favor is upon us, upon all, here and now.

That is the culminating promise of Epiphany—that our God is near, is here. That our God is indeed revealing God’s very self even when it appears that everything God is for cannot always be perceived.

Being a prophet was hard work! Jeremiah shied away from the task. And the folks in Jesus’ hometown wanted to stone him. Where is all the love Paul sings about in 1 Corinthians? It is there in the never-ending, steadfast love of God that surrounds us from our mother’s womb to the earth’s tomb. It is a love that strengthens us and gives us courage and perseverance in times of trial. It is a love that enables us to speak words of truth to a questioning and sometimes hostile world. Love, indeed, is the greatest of these.

We are all children of God. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you:” Moses and Jeremiah answered the call of God. If you’re willing, He has an assignment for you. It doesn’t matter what you bring to the table. It matters if you are willing to show up. God wants to use you and include you in His greater story.