

Jeremiah 1: 4-10, Luke 4: 21-30 Our Undomesticated God

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.’

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. ⁸ **Do 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. 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.’

Scripture has many stories of the Word of God coming at unsuspecting people, turning them into prophets and all kinds of servants of God. It’s one of God’s favorite moves with us humans, so much so that we see a pattern in how that encounter typically goes; they’re called “call narratives.” And we see it play out here with Jeremiah. It always begins with God’s initiative: “Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying...”

God’s next move is a pre-emptive one, as if God knows our initial reaction would be to resist, because we feel inadequate for the task God would have us do; who? me? Oh, no, I don’t have what it takes... So, before giving Jeremiah a chance, God explains, “I knew what I was doing when I created you, and for what purpose. You are made for this. This is yours to do.”

Still, Jeremiah doth protest: “Oh, I’m too young. I’m not ready. Not *today*.” God replies, “No, Today is the day. You’ll do fine, because you’ll go where I send you and speak the words I give you.”

Then, again anticipating Jeremiah’s concern even before he could articulate it, God reassures Jeremiah, saying “Do not be afraid of them; for I am with you to deliver you.” If Jeremiah wasn’t afraid before, he is now; ‘oh, so if I go through with this, I’d be in a situation where God would have to deliver me from. God had apparently thought this through, all the way through, including the exit plan.

Curiously, God did not tell Jeremiah simply “do not be afraid.” Rather, God said “do not be afraid of *them*.” Who was he not to be afraid of? The people God was sending him to? What would they do to him and why?

Last week, we listened to Jesus’ call narrative in Luke. Jesus was in his hometown Nazareth and went into the synagogue as he’d always done. On that day, he stood up to read the

Scripture, the Word of God, and finding the place in the scroll of Prophet Isaiah, read, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he sat down to teach and told all those in the synagogue, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Where Jeremiah had resisted, Jesus embraced the work God had given him to do and set out to do it without hesitation or fear. This is where we pick-up today, and we’ll see how it unfolds, with the eyes of all in the synagogue still fixed upon him. Hear now the Good News of Jesus Christ according to Luke 4: 21-30.

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 home town 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 home town.²⁵ But the *truth* is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for 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.

At first, people of Nazareth were very pleased with what they were hearing: the gracious words of fulfillment of God’s promises they’d waited for so long were coming to them right there and then. They were being oppressed by the Romans, just like other Jews living in other towns, so the message of freedom from oppression and physical and spiritual healing sounded sweet, and oh, to live to enjoy the favor of their God, brimming with mercy. This was a wonderful blessing, truly the good news.

Then, someone noted, “is this not Joseph’s son?” and soon they were all saying, why, this is our homeboy. Perhaps some said it to simply mean “isn’t it wonderful God is raising a true prophet from among us?” It’s possible, we don’t know. But it did not escape Jesus’s notice that some other thought had entered their mind, for he said before anyone “you’re going to say to me, doctor cure yourself,” that is, Jesus should “bring healing” to the place that raised him, Nazareth.

They had heard that Jesus had done powerful works in Capernaum, a town near Galilee that had a lot more Gentiles, non-Jews, living than in the predominantly Jewish Nazareth. Now that they realized Jesus was a son of Joseph whom they knew as one of their own, a sense of privilege entered their minds, to claim Jesus as one of their own and *for* their own. They wanted to keep God's blessings close by. Jesus was *their* homeboy, and they felt entitled to claim that as their privilege. If God's anointed is from Nazareth, then he should put Nazareth First. God bless Nazareth. The people of Nazareth wanted to domesticate Jesus, and by extension, the God who sent him.

Indeed, God has blessed Nazareth. Jesus returned to Nazareth and revealed his identity as God's anointed and declared the fulfillment of God's promises in the Scripture right there in their synagogue where he grew up. Yes, God's love has come to Nazareth, but the truth was, as Jesus as Jesus said, God is not to be bound within the boundary of Nazareth. God's love cannot be contained in the little container that was Nazareth. God's care extends beyond the border of Nazareth to every corner of God's beloved and suffering world.

Wanting to move the people of Nazareth from the smallness of their domesticated God to the largeness of the lovingkindness of undomesticated God, Jesus gave 2 examples from the Scriptures: the stories of Elijah and Elisha. Both prophets reached beyond the people of Israel to serve those who were among the vulnerable of the Gentiles, the non-Jews. During a famine, Elijah helped a poor widow in the foreign city of Zarephath and gave her a chance to respond in faith even as Israelites, too, were suffering from the famine. Elisha healed a foreign army official Naaman of Syria who suffered from leprosy, even though there were many lepers in Israel, too. Both the widow and Naam ultimately listened to God's prophets and obeyed their words.

Jesus was teaching them that God's power to save is not limited by any social construct humans insist as true. The truth is, Jesus said, God's mercy leaps across borders and boundaries and that is the good news of God had sent him to proclaim. But to listen and obey this undomesticated God, it takes undomesticated faith that radically trust God's largeness beyond their fancy.

The townsfolk of Nazareth had a hard time listening to Jesus, the prophet who shared the hometown with them, as Jesus knew they would. They wanted to keep God's blessings close by, within "their people" and within their bounds. So when Jesus did not preach "Nazareth First,"

but preached this undomesticated God who saw no border when it came to caring for the oppressed and the wounded and the suffering,” they drove him away to throw him off the cliff. What God had promised Jeremiah, “Do not be afraid of THEM” God had promised Jesus as well. Jesus knew God was with him to deliver him, and so he escaped.

Today, the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Today, God who called Jeremiah and others throughout history is still calling us to trust this largeness of God Jesus points us to in the Scripture. Jesus offers us his undomesticated faith and invites us to follow his undomesticated God, today, for that is where we see the glory of the goodness of the Lord, and all shall live in the year of the Lord’s favor. “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.” Amen.