

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 30 January 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

Our four readings in our Liturgy of the Word this morning speak about God's invitation to us to live fully. In the first reading, we hear God's call to Jeremiah, in the Gospel Jesus' response to God's call in the first moments of his public ministry, and in the Psalm and the reading from the first letter to the Corinthians each one of us is included in God's call. In all four readings, we learn that the call is precious, is unique to each one, respects each one's gifts, comes to us in the everydayness of our lives. God's call is to each one, each created being human and other-than-human.

From our readings, we learn that responding to the call comes at a cost. And we learn that the God who calls is always there to give strength and support in the person's response.



In the verses chosen today from the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah tells us how he heard God's call, "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" (Jer 1:5). How profound are these few words meant for us as they were for Jeremiah – God imagines us even before God creates us, God calls us holy before we are even born, and God calls us to go beyond our comfortable space "to all nations." Every one of God's creatures is chosen by God to come into being and to be holy.

But there is a second part of Jeremiah's call – that is the expectation that the response to God's call will not always be easy or comfortable or without pain. Martin Luther said it simply, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing." The one consolation is that God will be there, "I am with you to deliver you" (Jer 1:19). The psalmist, in extending the call to all of us, echoes this same message, "In you, O God, I take refuge. . . be to me a rock of refuge. . . For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O lord, from my youth" (Ps 71:1, 3, 5).

The first three readings all refer to our whole lifetime, beginning in Jeremiah with God's presence to us before our birth, at our birth, and when we are still young. The psalmist says, "Upon you I have leaned from my birth; from my mother's womb you have been my strength" (Ps 71:6). In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of his life as a child when he spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child (1 Cor 12:11). God's presence is with us for every moment of our lives, meeting us in that moment, loving us and nourishing us in that moment. Do we treasure every moment of our life as God's gift to us?

Celeste Snowber has written a [Bodypsalm for Lifelines](#) which reads in part:

Follow the threads of your life which announce joy  
a deep resonance for who you were meant to be  
when every bone, tissue, cell and fibre of your being  
says YES all over again to why you are here  
what you are meant for

It can be simple as a gesture of love or a glance at a falling leaf  
 or a pen to page or limb to dance  
 Follow the small and large visions placed in your heart  
 burning in your skin, the subtle impulses  
 and bold pulls of what you are called to  
 Each thread is a line, a curve,  
 a map to your delicious life that wants to be lived through you.

Every moment in our lifeline is a moment of prophecy lived in response to God’s invitation to us at that time in our lives. Whether we are newborn or teenaged or young adult or middle-aged or older, we are called to live our response to the person God has called us to be. “Each thread is a line, a curve, a map to your delicious life that wants to be lived through you.” What is God calling you to be in this moment in your life – what is the map to your delicious life today?

The reading from Luke’s Gospel is troubling. Jesus has just begun a special moment in his lifeline – the beginning of his public ministry. And he begins that moment in his hometown where he was brought up, comfortable, well-known as Joseph’s son, and welcomed to read often in the synagogue. We are told, “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth” (Lk 4:22). We can imagine how good that must have made Jesus feel – think about a time when the people of the place where you grew up celebrated you in a special way.



Then everything changes. Jesus reminds the faithful ones of his village of Nazareth that God also reaches out into the places we would never expect. The prophet Elijah goes to the widow of Zarephath in Sidon in Phoenicia, and Elisha cures Naaman of Syria from leprosy (neither were people of Israel or Judah).

The people of his hometown were “filled with rage” and threatened to throw him off the cliff. The writer of the Gospel says, “Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way” (Lk 4:30). But just imagine how Jesus must have felt, to be rejected and threatened by his own people, the people who had cared for him and supported him when he was growing up. His heart must have been breaking as he walked away.



What made the people so angry? Was it because Jesus dared to say that, to fulfill the Scriptures, they had to reach out to those who were not their own kind, to reach out to those who may even be their enemies? Dorothy Stang sncd, the American sister who was martyred in Brazil in 2005 for her work among the poorest people in that country, once said, “You love God as much as you love the person whom you love least.”

In the well-known poem on love in 1 Corinthians, Paul echoes Jesus’ teaching as he begins his ministry. Our first and most important response to God’s invitation, no matter at what point we are on our lifeline, is love. Having and sharing love is more important than being an influential speaker, a powerful prophet, or even a

person of deep faith – almost scandalous words! It is not always easy to have love, especially for those who do not think like me or look like me or value what I value. Ask Jeremiah and Jesus the price which they paid for loving! And yet that must be our first and constant response to God's call.

This week I invite you to read 1 Corinthians 12:4-8:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Reflect on which of the phrases describes how you live every day, which of the phrases challenges you most deeply, which of the phrases describes your greatest gift to those with whom you share your life journey today.

Let us conclude our reflections with a poem-prayer from the Progressive Christianity website, entitled "[A Celebration of Love](#)":

I have had many beautiful encounters with love in my life –  
Sometimes it has been the love of nature – the soft lines,  
strong trunks and the mossy smell of bush.

Sometimes love has been  
the tenderness of another person –  
a oneness in relationship, shared silence,  
the mingling of tears,  
the fragile flower of romance.  
Sometimes love has been  
a passion for justice, the fight for equality,  
a concern for others,  
grief at the Church's divisions,  
anger at its petty-mindedness.  
Sometimes love has been parenting  
of child and adult, of others and self,  
of nature and ideas.  
Sometimes love has been creating  
words and music, color and form,  
line and texture, buildings and gardens,  
one's own kind and one's own life.  
Sometimes love has been pain and sorrow,  
sometimes dream and fulfillment,  
sometimes tearful ecstasy,  
sometimes common sense practicality,



But at all times love has nurtured me, enlivened me.  
fulfilled me, wooed me and drawn me on into the oneness of God,  
divine lover, creator, liberator, never-dying life, the source of all our loving.  
And now in the knowledge that no love is ever wasted  
and that all love becomes part of God's love,  
I thankfully celebrate all the loving that God  
has graciously allowed me to partake, create, or enhance.