

Sunday Thought

30th January 2022 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Jeremiah: 1: 4 - 10

Psalm 71: 1 - 6

1 Corinthians 13: 1 - 13

Luke 4: 21 - 30

It's All About Love



The account of Jeremiah's call to be a prophet is a favourite reading of mine, not least because I share his experience of God's call to ministry at a very early age – maybe even before I knew it too! It means more to me though because of the wonderful appeal of

his character, so much like that of Jesus as to help us know more of our Lord.

Jeremiah spent much of his life in the town of Anathoth, just a few miles from Jerusalem where his father ministered as a priest. He possibly had royal connections too. His early call meant he had a long ministry through tumultuous times of international and religious trauma which involved him and his message being both loved and rejected by his people. His story shows him to be a deeply spiritual man of God and like the prophet Hosea, he understood how true religion is first and foremost a personal, individual friendship with God. By nature, Jeremiah was gentle but strong-willed on matters of truth and justice. He was something of an artist too. His writings are a picture gallery of daily life among his people and give us many hints of the flora and fauna of the Judaeen hills. An affectionate man, he was compassionate in calling his people to repentance and constantly praying for them. As a result, his ministry was a costly one for him. While he worked amid the political and religious conflicts of his time, he endured many personal trials as well. There are times when he appears timid, lonely, despairing and questioning of God's ways, yet his faith did not fail him. Throughout his life, even in the last exile, he hung on to the promises God gave him right at the beginning when he said, *'Remember **I** called you. **I** sent you to the people. You have MY authority. You will speak MY words and **I** will protect you.*

Our Gospel reading today fits well with Jeremiah, for he and Jesus had much in common – the artistry, the compassion, the trials, and their conviction of having a special relationship with the Father. Like Jesus, Jeremiah taught that the law and religious life was so much more than keeping rules. The law was all to do with being in love with God and letting it show in all human relationships. However, for both of them, preaching God’s messages brought rejection by their hearers and suffering at their hands.

The story about Jesus tells how, early in his ministry he shared Jeremiah’s experience. After a successful time in Capernaum, he was invited to preach in his home synagogue at Nazareth. The congregation was impressed. It was riveting! All eyes were fixed on him! Not everyone there though was so impressed with his message and the loudest voices persuaded the whole synagogue to reject him. *‘Who does he think he is? How can the carpenter’s lad dare to call us to repent? He can’t think he knows what God wants us to do!’* Then they asked why there were no miracles for them as there had been in other places. Jesus’ telling them it was because they had no faith was the last straw! His final retort to them was, *‘A prophet is never respected on home ground’*. Jeremiah was proof.

I had ministry in mind when I read the other scripture for today. It concludes Paul’s words about the Spirit’s ministry gifts. *‘You may have all the gifts of preaching, teaching, administration etc, but they are as nothing without the supreme gift – love.!’* Whenever I read those words, I think of Louisa. She was a hard-working farmer’s wife and a devoted mother. One of the real saints she was at the quiet hub of her rural chapel, and to that added the voluntary care of the elderly and infirm, family and neighbours. In place of an address at her funeral, the family asked for this passage from Paul to be read, *‘She was patient and kind, not proud, jealous or selfish. Never bearing a grudge, her word was always true. She never gave up and her faith, hope and love never failed. We know nothing about Jeremiah’s mother, but I believe Jesus had one like Louisa.*

A Prayer (with Psalm 71 in mind – an elderly person’s prayer – but for all ages really)

Lord my God, I will always praise you.
As I come to the shorter days of life’s year, I ask for one thing
- your protecting love.
May life’s trials never be too hard for me.
May I always be within hearing of your words.
Lord, my God, I will always praise you.
At every stage of my life, I have placed my hope in your promises.
In all which lies ahead of me I ask that you will be like a fortress built on rock for me –
my refuge and my defence.
I will praise you now and right to the end when I join in your people’s endless joy



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