

**Church of All Nations
February 2, 2025
Jeremiah 1:4-10
Luke 4:21-30**

Jeremiah was a young man with a fair bit of angst about him. He had a stormy, tumultuous relationship with God. A love/hate relationship you could say. He felt called to be a prophet, to proclaim the word to his generation. We read of his call in today's bible passage. Which was fine... except his message was one of woe and destruction. God's judgement is upon the decadence within the land. And of course no-one wanted to hear it; but Jeremiah could not stop declaring it – he says he tried but it burns his bones trying to keep it in. And so Jeremiah is in a huge bind and he lays the blame for his dilemma squarely at the door of God who calls him to be a prophet to the nation.

And so it is for Jesus of Nazareth. Another young man who is a prophet with a message that burns within him, which he cannot not proclaim, but finds himself in the eye of a storm.

Two young men both called to a prophetic ministry. Both called to the hardest task of all – prophetic ministry amongst your own people. Both carrying the burden of call and the excruciating dilemma of the cost.

The story we just heard from Luke is of Jesus' first sermon...actually it's the first thing he says at all in Luke's Gospel... apart from reading the scriptures. Jesus had just come back from the wilderness where he had been tempted by Satan for 40 days as he anguishes over the meaning of his call. I think that is an important context for today's reading; – and returning to his home town he entered the synagogue where he chose - or was it appointed by someone else? - to read these words of Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

And here is the local boy made good, come back to his own people, his home synagogue. And the interesting thing is Jesus seems, according to this text, to go out of his way to pick a fight; to provoke those who are locals. When I read this passage it often seems to me there is something missing in the story. How is it we go from, "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth" to, " ...all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town,..." and are about to throw him off the cliff?

The congregation never express any of the sentiments Jesus accuses them of.

But Jesus seems to have unearthed and exposed some hidden deep seated ugly parochialism it and in so doing Jesus has gone from being “our Jesus” to “the Outsider”

The issue is that Jesus seems to have picked up what we may call a spirit of tribalism or parochialism in the worshippers. Parochial, the adjective that describes a parish, also means: narrow-minded in scope or view, only concerned with the interest of one's small group.

How tragic that the word for parish has become a synonym for small-minded, exclusive self-interest. You did wonders in other places, but you are one of us, you owe us at least as much if not more than what you offered to others.

Many urge us to move beyond a narrow identification with those who surround us, who often look like us and think like us. And that is fair enough, sure we have to do that but I don't think it is that simple. I think our Christian faith at this point is in direct conflict with something elemental or even primeval. At this point faith in Jesus is at war with our human nature. There is something hard wired into human nature after countless thousands of years that to try and root it out risks rooting out something fundamental to our humanity? Maybe this is one specific trait where the new creature in Christ, the new humanity, is most desperately needed.

We are talking about a trait that has given humans their fundamental identity since time immemorial. My tribe, my people, those who tell me who I am. When humans were learning to domesticate animals and fire and use wheels and weapons the tribe was our whole existence. Literally you did not survive without your people and those other people were a threat by taking the scarce resources. I can imagine the group identity had precious little to do with love and a lot to do with the pragmatics essential for survival. We have not outgrown this mentality - Still competition and aggression form us into tribes that give us our identity.

Footy starts in a few weeks and again supporters are not content to barrack for their team but have to heap disdain on their opponents. A terrible tragedy in the USA and Trump declares it was due to diversity and inclusion policies who put incompetent migrants in charge at air control. Russia is not content with its boundaries and invades Ukraine and China eyes off Taiwan. And the colonial invaders struggled mightily with the humanity and hence basic rights of the people who lived in this land now known as Australia. And in a supreme irony we as a nation locked up people for years for coming to our shores seeking a better life. We demonise the other and so defend our own tribe. And don't think Christians are immune. There have been some of the deepest divisions in our society based on religion. Catholics and Protestants whether it be Ireland or even the ongoing squabbles of State funded education in Australia to this day.

And the scapegoat mechanism is very real. All that insecurity and self doubt and resistance can be projected onto those who are considered less.

This group experience and hence tribal identity is especially intensified for those undergoing hardship in a greater cause and for a higher calling. Soldiers who face battle and the distinct possibility of death, sporting teams who train through the long hot summer and the long cold winter and The point being that our family, tribe, is a huge and integral part of our identity. We draw meaning, purpose from these relations. That is not the issue. The problems is when we begin to draw boundaries around our select group. We are the The Chosen ones anointed for a task and a calling. Trouble is it can quickly become they are not the chosen ones and a small step to they are the unchosen.

In other places in Lk Jesus is quite Israel focussed - this story a precursor of what is to come, esp in Acts (sec part of Lk)

Most effective way to break that down is to get to know someone of the hated (or at least “other group”. To spend time, to look them in the eye, to break bread. Me with gay people - Paulo

Move from “accept’ or “tolerate” to celebrate.

And in our scripture for today Namaan and widow have not just ethnicity as a point of difference and discrimination but also extra dimension of marginalised - leper and widow

On this occasion Jesus avoids the terrible price to pay – for now.

³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Jesus moves on, beyond the reach of the congregation, beyond the constraints of small town prejudice, of inner city political correctness, of liberal, trendy soft inclusiveness to the suffering, sacrificial, tough love of the gospel of crucifixion and resurrection. He moves through them, to another crowd, another sermon, another hope, always in front, always elusive, always free. By now we have learnt it could not be any other way with our Lord and Saviour.