

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor  
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, January 30, 2022**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany/Year C**  
**First Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10**  
**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**  
**Gospel Reading: Luke 4:21-30**  
**Sermon Title: “For THEM Too?”**

## Theme

*People in Jesus’ hometown are initially pleased when he says that God will free the oppressed. Their pleasure turns to rage when he reminds them that God’s prophetic mission typically pushes beyond human boundaries so that mercy and healing are extended to those regarded as outsiders.*

## Text

### Jeremiah 1:4-10

<sup>4</sup>Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

<sup>5</sup>“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.”

<sup>6</sup>Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” <sup>7</sup>But 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.

<sup>8</sup>Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,  
says the LORD.”

<sup>9</sup>Then 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.

<sup>10</sup>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.”

### Luke 4:21-30

<sup>21</sup>Then [Jesus] began to say to [all in the synagogue in Nazareth,] “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

<sup>22</sup>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?” <sup>23</sup>He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do

here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” <sup>24</sup>And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. <sup>25</sup>But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah,

when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; <sup>26</sup>yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. <sup>27</sup>There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” <sup>28</sup>When they heard this, all in the synagogue

were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

## Sermon

During the Season of Epiphany, the readings, especially the Gospel Readings, are meant to be epiphanies, revelations of God's glory through Jesus Christ as he began his public ministry. Let's look at today's Gospel Reading and see what the Spirit reveals about Jesus Christ today.

Today we have the tale of two main characters: Jeremiah in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, and Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Let's talk about Jeremiah first.

Jeremiah was appointed "prophet of the nations" meaning all people, not the Jews exclusively. His ministry is presumed to be between 650 BCE and 570 BCE and that places his ministry during the Babylonian captivity, widely considered the worst era of Israelite history. God the Holy Spirit called Jeremiah from the womb and gave him an awesome responsibility to prophecy to the nations. His prophetic ministry began when he was still young and his mission was to prophesy a message of repentance and reformation.

You see, over the years, the Israelites became more and more faithless to their god, the God of Israel. And it was because of their faithlessness that God allowed them to be punished by one ruling nation after another. Though Jeremiah and other prophets of his era tried desperately to get their people to turn from their wicked ways, no one wanted to hear it. The consensus of the Israelite people including their kings was that faithfulness to the God of Israel had not yielded the results they wanted. Rather than heed the warnings of God through the prophets that the problem was with their faithlessness, and not God's, the people decided their solution was to try other pagan gods.

The particular passage that is our First Reading comes from the beginning of Jeremiah's book. In it, he wrote that the LORD "appointed" him to be a prophet to the nations. It was not a vocation he aspired to, and in several places in the book, he complained about it as burdensome. And since his prophetic message was unwelcome and not effective in getting the Israelites to turn from their wicked ways we can see why he felt that way.

Jeremiah's reply to God's calling was that he didn't know how to speak because he was only a boy. What that meant was that Jeremiah didn't feel mature enough, eloquent enough, and wise enough to be the LORD's mouthpiece. Isn't Jeremiah just like people?

This weekend at the Annual Congregation Meeting we will elect leaders to lead us in the direction God would have us go. I am an ex officio member of all committees, but to my point, I am an ex officio member of the Nominating Committee. This year's Nominating Committee did a good job filling all the vacant positions except one – ironically enough, next year's Nominating Committee. I find it disappointing that the Nominating Committee does its work in prayerfully discerning whom God may be raising up to lead, and then oftentimes, that person says no, often without much consideration. What happened to God's call? What happened to obedience to the Spirit and the honor of serving? But I digress. Back to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah started listing the reasons he was not qualified to be God's prophet, but the LORD God reminded him that the LORD equips whom the LORD calls. More specifically, the LORD said,

<sup>7b</sup>you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

<sup>8</sup>Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,

I don't pretend to understand the mind of God, but perhaps the only talent God gave Jeremiah was faithfulness – and that was all that God asked of him. God would do the rest.

Moving on to the Gospel Reading from Luke, we have the conclusion to last week's Gospel Reading.

Where we left off last week, Jesus had gone to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth to worship and pray as was his custom, and on this day he was given the honor to read and expound on the Holy Scripture. He found the text from Isaiah 61 where it is written,

<sup>18</sup>“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,  
<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

<sup>20</sup>And 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. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The Gospel Reading continues with the same story,

<sup>22</sup>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?”

Things were going well, weren’t they? They were so proud that one of their own, a son of the congregation, had made good.

And then things took a turn. I’m not going to read it all again for you, but it is as if Jesus deliberately provoked them to turn on him.

In last week’s sermon entitled, “Name It & Claim It” Jesus used verses 18-19 to define his ministry. It wasn’t his idea. It was God the Father’s, or perhaps the Trinitarian Godhead’s idea, it really doesn’t matter, because Jesus was going to be faithful and obedient. It is as if he said, “God has anointed me to do ministry to the world’s hurting and rejected people. These that Isaiah lifts up are the very ones you don’t allow in your synagogue, and call unclean.”

He pointed out that they and all Jews had abandoned their part of the covenantal relationship God had made with them. They were supposed to be a light to the Gentiles drawing all the nations to the one true God of Israel. He reminded them that there have always been occasions where God worked through a Gentile to get God’s mission accomplished because there were no faithful servants to be found among the Israelites. He even offered a couple of examples; the woman at

Zarephath whom the LORD used to sustain the ministry of Elijah, and of all people afflicted with leprosy, God chose to heal Naaman the Syrian.

Once again, Jesus named it and claimed it, but at this point in the story, the Nazarenes were not going to tolerate being insulted by him. “He’s no better than us,” they must have thought. So filled with rage, they tried to kill him. <sup>30</sup>But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

### **Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

The two stories we have as our First and Gospel Readings have several similarities. Both key figures in the stories, Jeremiah in the First Reading and Jesus in the Gospel Reading, were given specific missions from before they were born. Both were tenaciously faithful to God’s call. They both served at a time when God’s people, known as the Israelites in Jeremiah and the Jews in Luke, were unreceptive to their respective ministries. And both met violent ends.

According to American standards, we would have to say that both men were dismal failures. Jeremiah’s repeated message of repentance and reformation was unwelcome by his own countrymen wherever he went. The only way to shut him up was to kill him and so tradition records that Jeremiah was stoned to death by his Israelite countrymen in Egypt in about 570 BCE.

Jesus’ ministry was almost entirely limited to ministry to the Jews, although there are several stories where he ministered to Gentiles. At his Ascension, he made ministry to the Gentiles the mission of the Apostles. Who THEM? To those unclean Gentiles? Yes, THEM too. And aren’t we glad he did, because THEM are us.

Here is the point. God will not be limited to human understanding. Not in the fifth century BCE, not in the first century CE, and not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century CE. The Holy Spirit of the Living God has always found a way to get God’s will done – and if we thought about it, we would have to agree that that is a very good thing.

I further think that God would love to work through his faithful people, you and me, to reach all people, but we would have to be open to God’s call, and be willing to serve, trusting that God doesn’t call the equipped, God equips the called.

## **Prayer**

Almighty God, we pray that you would not lose patience with us. Rather, equip us with greater faith and a willingness to serve you and your creation when asked. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen