

#### 4 Epiphany C 2019

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalms 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

Depending on your theology –  
And yes, we all have a theology,  
Whether we can articulate it readily or not –  
Depending on your theology,  
You may have a variety of reactions  
To the uncomfortable gospel story  
We hear today.

This is a story we tend to leave in the background,  
Maybe even suppress.  
Many of us love the story  
That comes right before it,  
Where Jesus comes to his hometown synagogue,  
Reads beautiful and compelling words from Isaiah,  
And tells the people  
That the words of promise have come true,  
Right there and then,  
In their midst.

It is the stuff of romance,  
Or so we wish.  
A story where a good man comes to a good end.  
The hero comes home  
After a long journey,  
The prophecies come to fulfillment,  
The people are proud and happy,  
And all is well.

Oh, if only the gospel were like that.  
But this is not a happily ever after moment.  
Jesus is not the hero of a romance.  
He is the embodiment of God's good news:  
Love is stronger than death;  
All are welcome at the table,  
All harms will be healed.  
It's not a happy ending for some;  
It's the renewal of the world for all.  
The fulfillment of all hopes  
Come to life as he is speaking,

Because he is the good news,  
And it is in his presence  
That the promise becomes true for us.

But still, this is not a happily ever after moment,  
And Jesus is not the hero of a romance.  
He refuses to bask in the accolades  
Of his hometown family and friends.

This is where your theology,  
Whether you articulate it readily and frequently  
Or never speak of it,  
And would not call it your theology,  
This is where your theology  
Comes into play.

Why, do you think,  
Jesus did what he did?  
Why was he deliberately provocative?

Why, when the crowd has gone wild  
After what might be called his inaugural address,  
Does he turn on them,  
Put words in their mouths,  
And insult them with stories  
Of outsiders receiving preferment over them?

What do you think?  
Do you believe Jesus knows all things,  
And does this on purpose  
To set in motion a public ministry  
That is more inclusive and radical  
Than it otherwise could have been?

Or do you believe  
That he was human and fallible,  
And made a big mistake here?

Or do you believe  
That he was, at this point,  
Not quite grown up,  
Not quite in control of his responses,  
Not quite sure where he was going?

Do you believe he was teaching something here,  
Or learning something?

Regardless of what you believe about this story –  
And at times I have been persuaded by each of these,  
And some other positions –  
This story is a turning point.

Jesus does not come home to remain,  
He goes on his way.  
This homecoming is the beginning of the journey  
Outward and onward.

And so we, as his followers,  
Go with him.  
Though this is not a romance of journey and return,  
We could still say,  
We follow him on the outward journey now.  
And we do not know where the road will lead,  
Only that we will not be alone.

This is not an easy call.  
But many have gone before us on the way.  
And many have tried,  
For a while,  
To hang back.

Like Jeremiah in the first lesson.  
Jeremiah protested  
When he heard God's call.  
He shrank back  
From the great adventure of life with God.

I can't be a prophet,  
He protested.  
I'm too young.

God is not interested in this feeble excuse,  
And blows it away, as usual.

It's not a matter of being too young,  
As God knows –  
Too young, too preoccupied,  
Too busy, whatever,  
No, when we turn away from the prophetic call,  
It's often about fear.

Fear of being too inexperienced,

Fear of looking like a fool,  
Fear of getting hurt  
Or running out of energy or time or money.

There are plenty of good reasons  
To shrink away  
When the call comes.  
It's hard work to be a prophet.

Jesus knew this, like Jeremiah.  
Jesus knew it was hard work to be a prophet,  
And he did not shrink from the task.  
A golden moment was in his hands,  
A sunset moment,  
But the very next moment  
He turns it upside down,  
And then, instead of rushing to praise him,  
The people of his hometown  
Hem him in,  
And crowd him towards the cliff.

What gave him the strength, and the courage,  
To turn his back on comfort and praise,  
And pass through the midst of the crowd,  
To be on his way?

I wonder if it was love.

Love gave him the courage, the strength,  
The vision.

Love gave him the will.

It doesn't look like love,  
Perhaps, this angry outburst  
Against the people of his hometown.  
But I wonder –  
If it doesn't look like love to me  
Maybe that's because I can't see it right.

Maybe the love that sent Jesus out from Nazareth and on his way  
Was the hard-working,  
Self-giving love  
That Paul came to know,  
And proclaimed to the church at Corinth.

These words are as familiar to us, perhaps,  
As any words of Jesus,  
Though we usually hear them at weddings,  
And consider them romantic,  
When actually, they are bracing,  
Even challenging.  
Love bears all things, believes all things,  
Hopes all things, endures all things.  
Love never ends; it is stronger than death.

Paul, too, is a prophet,  
Speaking for God  
And showing forth God's vision.

And here, too,  
The words of the prophet come true  
In a person,  
In the person of Jesus.

He is the love that bears all things and hopes all things.  
He is the love that cannot die.  
He is the love that is not afraid.

He is that love;  
He offers that love to us.  
And what we accept, we become.

We are called to be love.  
We are called to be prophets.

We are called to proclaim,  
with our lives,  
by our choices and in our actions  
and with our courage,  
we are called to proclaim  
that God is here and now.

How are we are called,  
Here and now,  
To embody the love  
That God makes known in Christ?

How are we called,  
In this time when we so clearly  
Have lost our way as a country?  
How are we called,

Here in this place,  
Where, though the true way is still clear,  
Some paths have ben closed?

We don't know what it looks like,  
From day to day,  
In these times that are bewildering and even frightening.  
Embodying that love  
may take us to the edge of the cliff.  
It may leave us asking to be let go.  
We may wonder how we got here  
And where we are going.  
There may be times  
When we wish we could just go home.

But we are home.  
Wherever Jesus is,  
The one who is always going on,  
Wherever he is,  
There is home.

This is where he is now,  
As he is everywhere  
His followers gather  
To find him  
known in scripture and the breaking of bread.  
He makes this a home.

We built this church  
We, and those who have gone before us,  
To welcome God into our midst,  
And God welcomes us  
When we come in.

Every year,  
At this time,  
We take stock of who we are,  
What we can do,  
How we are called,  
What lies ahead.  
Every year,  
We encounter the expected challenges,  
The unexpected gifts,  
The surprises, the losses, the disappointments.

Every year,

The journey begins again,  
As it did for the prophets,  
For the first followers in the way of Jesus,  
For Jesus himself.

We begin here,  
And we return here.  
We find love here,  
And that love sends us out  
To be love,  
To look for love,  
To offer love.

We're all looking for a happy ending.  
And yet, right now and always,  
This place, and this time,  
Is not our happy ending,  
But the beginning of our next adventure.