

**PENT. 13 Proper 16, August 22, 2010- Jer. 1:4-10 R. Prior****Prayer**

The Hebrew Scripture lesson today is taken from Jeremiah actually the call of Jeremiah and for the next few weeks we will be following this book in our lectionary. Jeremiah was a prophet as verses 1-3 tell us from the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah (627 BC) through the captivity of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BC, about 40 years. Jeremiah was of the priestly line of Eli and the tribe of Benjamin. He is also seen as a successor to Moses although Moses led the people from bondage to freedom in the promised land and Jeremiah's time ended with the people entering a long period of exile in Babylon just as Israel had been in exile in Egypt. Jeremiah lived in that turbulent time in which Solomon's Temple was destroyed and the most talented people in the culture of his time were removed from Jerusalem. It was a time when Babylon was ascendant over former powers Assyria and Egypt both of which were in decline, and Judah was caught in the middle of that international situation.

Today as we baptize three young children we are confronted with Jeremiah's very personal account of the challenge of his youth and his prophetic call. He is himself clearly a young person who feels he is not able to speak for he is only a boy. But the word of the Lord came to him and challenged him to take up a prophetic ministry in a difficult time. The lesson for today offers assurance of God's presence and guidance for him as he undertakes this ministry and these

words serve as a challenge to us and those whom we bring into our fellowship through baptism about what call we feel and how we will live it out.

These children Caeley Jeanne Nicole, Tyler Michael, and Sheridan Renee are real charmers, they are cute and cuddly and it is easy to get into the joy of celebrating new life in our midst as a parish on occasions like this. But it is also vital that we not miss the serious business that is taking place here. We are calling on these young children (through their parents and godparents) to begin a process of growing into ministry in Christ's Church for which we will prepare them. As we say together the Baptismal covenant and recite in Creed the heart of our faith as we do in baptism we are reminded of the call and commission upon each of us. How will we answer the call to ministry in our time and in the face of the challenges of our world? That is serious business and we need to not be in denial about it.

Jeremiah records that God says "No matter that you are only a boy for you are destined to go and deliver the words I have put in your mouth to proclaim God's truth and action in history to nations and kingdoms, to pluck up and pull down; to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant. God touched Jeremiah's mouth and sent him to that difficult mission. We inherit that mission too.

We are, all of us, adults and young children, inheritors of that mission and people who have been touched in our hearts and minds and spirits with the power of God working in the world. It is expected of us that we will do something to live

that out in ways that make a difference. Baptism as it occurs several times a year is a reminder that we have that vocation and live with the assurance of God's presence and also the expectation that we will take that claim upon our lives seriously.

Bill Willimon of Duke Univ. says of Baptism *"Jesus means to name you. He will not let you acquiesce to the names the world wants to lay upon you. You are like the woman in the gospel, a Daughter of Abraham. Your life is meant to count for something to take its place on the stage in God's great drama of redemption. ...When we baptize a baby, we ask what name has been given to the child. And then as the parents say John or Joan we also lay upon the child a much more determinative and revealing name----Christian. We predict that this child's life will be a long story of growing into that name and living into God's gracious dreams for us. You also are a daughter or son of Abraham. Your name, whatever else we may call you is "Christian". Stand up straight and act like it, go in peace."*

So what is our role in the drama of redemption and what is that of those we baptize? **Do we even think of baptism and ministry in that way or is it just a matter of propriety, having something done that we have some remote sense of needing to have done?**

The drama of redemption is seen in the gospel for today pretty clearly. A woman bent over with a crippled back for 18 years who seeks to be freed for life.

Setting her free is criticized because it took place on the wrong day and violated some rules that the leader of the synagogue thought important. In their hypocrisy those same rules could be bent when it came to taking care of their livestock and protecting their property but not when it came to freeing a person from a terrible ailment. They felt so strongly about it that the leader was willing to triangulate Jesus in front of the whole crowd of bystanders to protect his sense of limits and propriety. Whose word were they speaking?

**And the question for us is whose word are we speaking?** Is it self serving words of self interest, of our own prejudices and perspectives or a word that seeks freedom and release from bondage for all? Is it a word that seeks justice and recognizes the dignity of every human being? Is it a word that sees the gift of God that each person is? Is the word we speak building a community that is open and respectful of all persons and situations, of varying social status, physical condition, gender and orientation and yes even of all faiths? Or is it about building a community that takes care of ourselves but is hardened to the needs and situations of others?

Like you, I have been reading and hearing a lot about religion in the media recently. It has been going on for a while, but recently has focused on the issue of the construction of a mosque in lower Manhattan. I know that are a lot of factors in this both political and emotional. The sensitivities of those of all faiths who have lost loved ones are important. But I don't think there should be any

confusion about either the religious or the constitutional aspects of this issue. Many of the cultural messages and opinions about this issue in our society are troubling. The tendencies to generalize about people of a different faith and their deservedness for an activity center and place of worship based on the actions of a radical few is reprehensible.

The heart of the gospel for today is recognizing the right of a daughter of Abraham to life and freedom in spite of the narrow interpretation of rules and the prevailing cultural assumptions that would obstruct and prevent that. Jesus looks beyond conventional wisdom and acts in ways that are loving and liberating. The opponents who sought to condemn him, the gospel says, were put to shame and the crowd which was provoked to condemnation ends up rejoicing at the things he did.

The time is long since passed that world's religions which claim Abraham as father bury the hatchet and begin to act in love and with understanding toward each other and not repeatedly out of fear and mistrust. People of good will in all three of the Abrahamic faiths are more and more seeking to combat the steady drumbeat of mistrust, and alienation that comes from some quarters in our society. It is nothing less than the commission of our baptism that demands that we respect the dignity of every human being. That is not just people like us, that agree with us, that we like, or feel totally comfortable with. It is a command to stand up for the dignity and freedom of every human being. That is true in the debate about

mosques and Muslims in our society and it is true in the legally very complex but emotional debate about immigration in our society.

*An issue similar to the New York case has been resolved in our own area. The lovely chapel built on the ground floor of the Pentagon right next to the 9/11 memorial garden (in which I have functioned several times) is a place of prayer for all faiths. And why should it not be? Faith is about seeking for justice and peace, for understanding and redemption, for the hope for new life brought out of the death dealing ways of the world. Stand up and act like it and go in peace!!!*

In Baptism we say we are buried with Christ in his death and raised in a resurrection like his. As baptized people we need to be about taking that seriously and showing it in ways that reflect a commitment to the love that is central to the heart and ministry of Jesus. Stand up and act like it and go in peace!!!

AMEN.