

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (C)

Jeremiah 1.4-10

Psalms 71.1-6

1 Corinthians 13.1-13

Luke 4.21-30

The lessons this week continue the Epiphany theme of the revelation of God and His will for us. Jeremiah recounts his original call and commission to speak for the LORD to his people. The psalm speaks of the assurance of the LORD's help to those who testify to God's greatness. As the epistle makes clear, in this world "we see as in a mirror, dimly" ["as through a glass, darkly"], but in the next shall see "face to face." Jesus makes clear to the members of His home town synagogue that He does not come to tell us simply what we want to hear; that if we seek to fulfill our own expectations in God's will we have not discerned His will properly.

**Jeremiah 1.4-10**

1. Jeremiah testified at the time that the Assyrian empire was being eclipsed by the rise of Babylon (late 7<sup>th</sup> century and early 6<sup>th</sup> century, B.C.). In the midst of this political change, the kingdom of Judah, which had been ruled well, was subject to deplorable rule, resulting in its fall, and the exile of the Jews to Babylon.
  - a. In the midst of this turmoil, the LORD called Jeremiah to be a prophet to Judah and the nations; to reemphasize the covenant of the Jews with the LORD.
    - i. The king of Judah, Jehoiakim, ignored Jeremiah's warnings, and the kingdom fell.
  - b. The text of Jeremiah has been subject to a number of editings and redactions, and may reflect the work of more than one original author.
    - i. The prophet's name means "The LORD has established."
2. Today's lesson is the very beginning of Jeremiah's oracles against Judah, beginning with a dialogue between the prophet and the LORD.
  - a. When the LORD says "I formed you," the verb used refers to the action of a potter, as in Gen. 2.7-8, and the meaning is thus one of creation.
    - i. "[I]n the womb:" Jeremiah's usage begins the theology in Judaism that God forms the person in the womb; that in the womb an unborn child is a person.
      1. God knows the person and unique from the very moment of his/her conception.
    - b. "I knew you:" The verb does not refer solely to intellectual knowledge, but also to an action of will and sensibility. The individual soul is identified with its Creator.
    - c. "I consecrated you:" The verb refers to setting something aside for holy purposes only.
    - d. "[T]o the nations:" The law of the LORD is not for the Jews only.

**Psalms 71.1-6**

1. In this individual lament the psalmist speaks of his determination to go on praising God despite whatever happens to him.
  - a. God is the source of all strength.
    - i. We must have confidence in God's saving righteousness.

2. Twice the psalm refers to the LORD's saving presence when the psalmist was young (vv. 5, 17), and twice in old age (vv. 9, 18).
  - a. God protects the faithful throughout this life.

### **1 Corinthians 13.1-13**

1. The famous "love" chapter of 1 Corinthians must be seen in the context of Paul's overall address concerning the problems faced in churches (11.2-14.40).
  - a. Paul has first discussed decorum at assemblies of the Church (11.2-16), the Eucharist (11.17-34), the gifts of the Spirit in a congregation (12.1-11), and that the Body (the Church) needs many members (12.12-31). He now addresses love as the greatest gift, as the greatest fruit of the Spirit.
    - i. Paul addresses his chapter on love to the Corinthians in the context of the dissension within their church.
2. Paul begins his instruction on the "more excellent way" with three statements in which he contrasts a specific spiritual gift mentioned in ch. 12 with the need for love.
  - a. Tongues (12.28); prophecy (12.10, 28); knowledge (12.28); faith (12.9); helping (12.28).
    - i. This order is not accidental. It progresses from the lowest gift, tongues (*see* 14.6-12), through the intellectual gifts and miracle-working faith to acts of supreme devotion benefiting others.
  - b. "I am nothing:" Only by loving does the Christian exist authentically.
3. Rather than describe love, Paul personifies it.
  - a. The fifteen verbs used all involve another person, and were chosen to order to highlight virtues which the Corinthians had neglected.
    - i. The strong were not "patient and kind" (8.1-13).
    - ii. The sexual ascetics tended to "insist on their own way" (7.1-40).
    - iii. The community "rejoiced at wrong" (5.1-8).
4. Paul contrasts the Corinthians' overvaluing of spiritual gifts "now" (in the present) with a future ("then") in which they will give supreme importance to the essential virtues of faith, hope and love.
5. Paul refers to seeing "face to face" with the Greek word *epignōsomai*, "I shall really know."
  - a. This verb is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the *Septuagint*) to refer to the quality of Moses' knowledge of God (Exod. 33.11; Num. 12.8; Deut. 34.10).
  - b. Paul is contrasting present knowledge with real knowledge of God's glory. He is not referring to the beatific vision.
    - i. Faith and hope are incompatible with the beatific vision, but with love are essential to Christian life (1 Thess. 1.3; 2 Thess. 1.3-4; Col. 1.4-5).

### **Luke 4.21-32**

1. Jesus continues His teaching in His hometown.

2. Nazareth was in an area in which Jews were the minority. The majority of the population was Samaritans (who often combined a form of Judaism with the recognition of pagan gods) and people of Hellenistic/Roman culture.
  - a. The inhabitants of Nazareth were, therefore (like Israeli settlement dwellers today), particularly conservative in their religious outlook.
  - b. Thus, when Jesus refers to Elijah being sent to the widow at Zarephath (a Syrophoenician woman, *i.e.*, a Gentile) and Elisha cleansing Naaman the Syrian (another Gentile), He is telling His hometown ultra-orthodox Jews that God's grace extends to all peoples, and that their attitude toward their neighbors is sinful.
    1. This is why they are "filled with rage" and seek to kill Him.
    2. God does not seek to fulfill *our* expectations. His will is sovereign.
  - c. All this at the very start of Jesus' public ministry!
    - i. Luke emphasizes, repeatedly, God's love for the outsider and outcast.
3. "[N]o prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown:" Luke emphasizes the history of prophets being rejected, but that God's patience in the face of this ongoing rejection exceeds all expectation.