

Jeremiah 1:4-10 (NRSV)

⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵“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.”

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

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

⁹Then 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.

¹⁰See, 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.”

This passage is, of course, the call of Jeremiah to the role of prophet. It is among the opening verses of the book of Jeremiah – the book which contains the writing of this prophet as he lived out this call. But what does it mean to be called to be a prophet. Certainly we can name some prophets – Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah these were prophets who, like Jeremiah, left a legacy of writings. Then there are other prophets no less important, but yet ones who didn't leave writings... prophets like Samuel, Elijah and Elisah. We even have female prophets such as Huldah and Anna. And we even have a prophet who was misguided and needed correcting by God – the prophet Jonah. We know these names ... and we know their stories ... but do we really know what a prophet's role truly was.

The role of a prophet --- any of these prophets --- was one honoured within society ... but that doesn't mean they were popular. For they had the task of speaking truth ... even inconvenient ones. Truths that people – especially the rulers might not want to hear. But truths that came from their encounter with God.

And their encounters with God came in many different ways. For Isaiah it was a vision of the Lord sitting on a throne and then seraphim holding a live coal to his lips to cleanse his words. For Samuel it was a voice calling in the night “Samuel,

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Samuel” and his faithful response “Here I am”. For Elijah the small still voice in the silence. For Ezekiel and Daniel it was strange and vivid visions.

But yet, despite the many different personalities of these prophets, despite their different genders, their different locations, their different eras of history, the message of these prophets was really quite similar. And that message? FAITH!

Whether it was a call to turn away from false gods to the One True God; whether it was dire warnings of what lay ahead for those who continued in their disobedience; whether it was a reminder to the rich and the powerful of their obligation to the poor and vulnerable; or whether it was a reminder of God’s promise of redemption and salvation the prophetic message was always a call to faith. And a call to faith that called its hearers to action.

For that is the inconvenient truth of the prophets. Faith was not just some solitary, personal commitment one made in the comfort of one’s own home. No faith ... true faith ... was a way of being in this world. A way to live. Faith is active not passive. The prophets ... transformed by their encounter with God --- whatever form that encounter took ... taught those who would listen how to live a faithful life ... how to live the faithful life all of us were created to live. All of us

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who were named as God's own as we were created in the womb. For that is the essence of the prophetic message – it reminds us who we are ... and whose we are.

Now, we no longer have the institution of prophet in our society... but that does not mean we do not have prophets. Many of us can name people who have acted in much the same manner as prophets of old ... people who have encountered God in some way ... and then struggled to communicate that to others ... calling us back to our better selves. Look at some of the world leaders who fought racism ... Nelson Mandela, Dr. King ... who struggled at great personal risk to remind us we are all brothers and sisters. Or those who cared for the vulnerable ... Mother Theresa, Jean Vanier ... who lived with great personal sacrifice to remind us all of our responsibility to care for the most vulnerable of God's children. Think for a moment of some author whose words have inspired you, some song writer whose poetry resonated with you. Some film maker whose vision challenged you. For there are still many prophets amongst us ... reminding us of our better selves, holding up those terrible mirrors that speak the truth we don't want to hear, but we know is God's truth.

If we all take the time ... we can each of us think about someone ... not necessarily famous ... but someone who has spoken a truth to us we needed to hear ... or

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someone who has awoken within us our better selves ... or someone who has reached out to show us a better way. Just take a moment and think about that...

these prophets in your life.

(Pause)

We all have them don't we? But the other truth is that we can all be them can't we? We have all been fashioned by God ... just as Jeremiah was... consecrated and named. We have all encountered God ... within The Word, at the table, in our prayers. And in these encounters we have been named his ... little Christ's Christians. In these encounters we have been reminded who we are and whose we are. We are the priesthood of all believers and we are also all prophets of God. The challenge is how do we live out that role? How do we reach out and assure others that they are indeed beloved Children of God. How do we proclaim the truth of God's grace and love in our lives. How do we model a life of righteousness and compassion caring for the least of those of his family? How do we model a life in which our faith finds action? How do we love all of God's beloved? How do we live our lives proclaiming who we are ... and whose we are?