

## Pastor Roy's Sermon from February 3, 2013

Jeremiah 1:4-10, Psalm 71:11-6; I Corinthians 13, Luke 4:21-30

Children's sermon: Valentine's Day. A Pastor a long time ago. He told the people to love one another. How can you love your brother, sister, school mates? By being a friend? By being kind?

What does a prophet do? Tell what's going to happen in the future? Or tell what's truly happening right now.

Jeremiah knows that bad news is coming about how things were in his day and that they weren't going to improve much. He hesitates when God calls him to become a prophet. "I'm just me. What do *I* have to say, and who will listen anyway?" How is it that we underestimate our ability to speak or act for God and assume that no one is listening?

Jeremiah speaks God's response, "Do not be afraid, I will deliver, I will put my words in your mouth." God's Spirit touches Jeremiah's mouth.

From that point Jeremiah does open his mouth, and God stirs the hearts of those who hear his words. To pluck up and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. There is always hope and promise in God's message.

Jesus also proclaims the good news to his townsfolk. They love his words about how God helps the poor. Almost all of them were poor.

But when he reminds them that outsiders--Gentiles--are chosen when the Hebrews and Jews resisted the prophets, then they become angry. He threatens their comfortable religion. "God would never call me to sacrifice on behalf of the poor. My way is God's way!"

No, the prophets proclaimed the need to carry out social justice! Jesus said the Spirit meets those who listen, who are willing to follow, who are open to the Word of the Lord, who are satisfied with the daily gifts of God and open the way for everyone to come to God and have enough.

Jesus confronts his neighbors. Jeremiah confronted his neighbors. They needed to be challenged. Don't we all at times? Isn't that why we read books, gather for worship and study, have conversation? Think about if our bodies stop producing new cells or a plant stops growing. There must be growth for there to be life.

Unless we are confronted with our own darkness, ego self which fears so much and yet pretends that all is well.

The prophets and Jesus challenge us to be open to God's newness which involves change and sacrifice. Unless we hear the message and follow it, we will die or possibly are as good as dead. Woe to us if we fail to grow in faith—if we believe in the same God and relate to that God in the same way we did as a child. Woe to us. Woe to me. Woe to you. Jesus and the prophets rocked the boat. Do you feel it rocking in Nazareth? Do you feel it rocking in Dillsburg and Franklinton?

What is the positive message of Jesus and Jeremiah? To what must we open ourselves?

Could it be that Paul speaks the Word in I Corinthians 13? The chapter begins with a simple idea. Anything without love is worthless. Love trumps all. Nothing else matters until love is discovered and practiced in profound, life changing way. Then he defines love (vss. 4-7). Then he reminds us that the foundation for everything is love. He admits that all of our understandings are a bit foggy. Our faith is just as foggy. But what really matters is love. Love defines faith. Faith which lacks the foundation of love is worthless. We might not know what faith and hope are, but if we follow love, we will be in good shape.

As I mentioned during the announcements this love is not first about romance or “falling in love.” This love is the highest form of relating to everyone.

Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

There are no limits to love. Love is strong. Love is not weak. Love speaks the language of equality and mutuality. Yes, love makes difficult choices, love sacrifices for the good of others. But take note, love is not a capitulation to greed, immaturity, or ego worship. Love is not a doormat. Love is not a worm which gets trampled under foot.

Love is discerning. Love can say no—love must say no, at times. Love says, I will not allow you to do that because it’s not good for *you*. Love calls enemies to a higher ground. Love questions the status quo, the commonly accepted but subtly violent ways of doing things. Love cuts a new path. Love takes all kinds of chances because it knows that growth takes time and can be painful. Love calls for deep, sacrificial engagement. Love sheds tears. Love insists on taking the high road.

Love led Jeremiah to speak courageous words to his people. Love led Jesus to do the same and ultimately offer his life on a cross to give the final illustration and example. He had done everything else. In the face of the choice to run away or turn violent, he hands over his life and shows us that some things are worth dying for.

This is love. Many, many saints, like St Valentine have made the same choice when asked to recant their faith in love and practice; they gave up their lives because they knew that it was better to die than to live violently.

These voices of the prophets and of our Lord and his followers—they call us to be open to God's love regardless of the sacrifices required. Listening to the voice of love calling us to higher ground is not easy. We fall and fail in our attempts time and time again. We must not give up.

What message of love is God speaking to you? How does it involve justice? mercy? It’s not too late! God is shining upon us.

Mother Teresa--We can do no great things. Only small things with love.

We are created by God, gifted by the Spirit to take our place—to serve, to relate, to be well, and call others to be well. How is God calling you to love? May we have the courage to say yes, and to help one another in this journey of faith. Amen.