

From The Pastor

‘The word of the Lord came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you’. Jeremiah the prophet is the writer and the hearer of these words. Such words are deep, personal, and profound. It is not the kind of word that can be taken lightly or easily be dismissed.

The words are universal and inclusive as much as they are personal and specific. We are all formed by the mind and the will of the Lord before we are born. The Lord has a personal knowledge and purpose for each of our lives as we come into existence. The creative love of God expressed in our being born is the imprint of the divine love evident in our existence. That love is personal and intimate, unique to each of us. Regardless of the call on our lives in this gift of love, it remains personal and profound in our being. The joy of maturing faith is the discovery and realization of this love and call deep within ourselves as we move through life. Some deeply realize this inner love and build their lives upon it. Others never seem to trust this love deep within and spend their lives looking for it.

Most of us are somewhere in between these two poles. We realize, in faith, the love God has for us, yet we resist the call and vulnerability of what this love might mean for us. This is the case with Jeremiah. He is a late teenager when he can no longer resist the power of the word of God that he has long felt deep within his being. Still he resists what the word might mean for him.

After a few omitted verses, the Lord continues to speak to the youth. ‘But do you gird your loins; stand up and tell them all that I command you’. To gird your loins (this is a command and not a question) means to get ready for action. Prepare your clothes for action and be ready to move out when I call. In this case, despite Jeremiah’s resistance, God is not taking no for an answer. God is aware of all he is asking of Jeremiah. He empathizes with his hesitance. Nevertheless, the point of the reading is clear: ‘they will fight against you but will not prevail over you, for I am with you, says the Lord’.

When God gives a call, God will give the necessary talents and resources to accomplish it. The call will not be easy, but God will be faithful in defending all he sends for his purpose. The Lord tells Jeremiah, ‘do not be crushed on their account for I will make you a fortified city, a pillar of iron, and a wall of brass against them’. As you can imagine, such words will be consoling only to a point.

This is why Jeremiah returns to the words that ring so deeply in his soul. This is no idle mission for which he is sent. It is God’s call, for God’s purpose that burns deep in his heart. He learns to trust and go forward despite all trials.

This reading parallels the gospel as Jesus begins to face the derision and rejection of his mission as Messiah. People don’t want to believe him. They are skeptical and mistrusting. After initial excitement and admiration, the mood quickly turns dark, and resistance and rejection comes to the fore.

Like Jeremiah, Jesus has a deep experience of the Father’s call and blessing. Jesus’ baptism serves as a confirmation of the Father’s love and a deep inner knowing of the mission that lies before him. Secure in this love and motivated by the Holy Spirit, Jesus draws from this inner power to face and disarm the ridicule and suspicion that will confront him.

Initially affirmed and inspired by Jesus’ words, the mood of the crowd quickly changes when he challenges them to a mature and active faith. They must look beyond what they think they know of Jesus and see the action of God upon Him. They cannot make this leap of faith. Their inner boundaries of expectation and religious prejudice block them from accepting Jesus. Now the mood turns ugly and they are ready to do violence to Jesus by throwing him off the cliff, which would mean his death.

How do these readings apply to you and I? On some level, we all want to throw Jesus off the cliff. The reality is, Love is too much for us. We want to know and love Jesus yet all too quickly his truth and invitation becomes too much and we retreat. Rather than accept the challenge of growth and conversion to a deeper faith we tend to ‘throw Jesus off the cliff’ by moving away.

Why is that? I would suggest it is because most of us have not realized the deep inner words of love the Lord has planted in our hearts. Without knowing deeply the love God has for us, we are unwilling and unable to face the challenges that the gospel lays before us. Only because Jesus and Jeremiah knew and accepted the Father’s love were they able to go forward.

This takes us back to the beginning. Ponder the words spoken to Jeremiah as if they were spoken to you. ‘Before you were formed in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you’. This is true for you too. It is a word of deep love and affirmation of your existence. You too are an instrument of God and an agent of God’s good purpose. God is with you and will defend you in times of trial. Gird your loins, and be ready for action on behalf of the Lord who loves you.