

## **Homily Trinity 10**

When God calls you no one knows really what to expect, he called Jeremiah to a public facing and challenging life of purpose and prophecy telling him

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.'

Suddenly, Jeremiah's life became about something bigger than himself, or his own hope, it was about God's work, and God had claimed him for that work even before he was born.

We are not Jeremiah, but we can learn from his experience of being called by God. As with Jeremiah, so with us, God calls us to a life lived for the sake of God's people a life of love service and of mission to others in the world.

We are called into a story that has already begun, in a very real sense God knows us before we know God. We enter into God's world part as of God's creation, and we grow up into a life already embedded and entwined with the lives of others. It is a story that we enter which was begun and will be ended by the activity of God.

Jeremiah lived as we do ,during a time of great political and religious upheaval, and he is called to speak an uncomfortable word, a dangerous word, and a word that will call people to account. He is given the vocation "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Judgment and mercy then are the two sides of Jeremiah's message, though judgment seems to predominate in his calling rather than mercy (four verbs of destruction — "pluck up, pull down, destroy, overthrow" — compared to the two verbs of restoration — "build and plant" though over time mercy may last longer)

Jeremiah tries to get out of it ;he is he says too young and doesn't have the words. He knows his limitations; he recognises the size of the task. It is a common reaction from those called by God — they or we feel inadequate and unprepared.

Jeremiah protests, but God tells him I am with you; and I will give you the words to speak. Then 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.'"

Jeremiah is called to a task bigger than himself, but the good news is he does not have to do it alone. It is God's mission; God will provide him with the tools and God will be with him in the midst of the struggle.

It was though, still a struggle being a prophet. Jeremiah's message did not endear him to the people. He was put into stocks, thrown into a pit, mocked and humiliated. He was deeply unpopular. He received death threats. When he passed by in the marketplace, people pointed at him and laughed. Not surprising then that after many years, Jeremiah tried to quit. He handed in his notice in effect saying : "I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' but within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot".

So this pain is one place where God's call can lead but In spite of his troubles, Jeremiah can't quit. The call of God is so strong upon his life that to deny it is to be consumed by fire from within .

No matter what the cost, he must speak the word that God gives him. The reality for all who follow God's call is that it may cost us everything that we hold dear, and at the same time bring us great joy. Jesus speaks of the same uncomfortable truth: in the Gospels "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39). Just think how many of the first disciples, and other Christians were martyred for their beliefs and for sharing that faith!

Even at this low point, Jeremiah realizes the truth of God's promise right at the beginning of his ministry. God will not abandon him; he says, "The Lord is with me like a mighty warrior" (Jeremiah 20:11). God remains with him even in the struggle

Jeremiah's call and his life and ministry illustrate both the risks and the joys of discipleship. His witness, and the witness of the saints through the ages, show us that the life that we find when we follow God's call, is

the life most worth living, life in all its fullness To become or even to try to become the people that God calls us to be, to become disciples of Jesus Christ, is to accept the fearful challenge to change, become really and fully human, reflecting God's image.

We know that Jeremiah is only of many.

The writer to the Hebrews, in chapter 10 declares “ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” and then in the next chapter 11 shows us many, many people from history, including Moses himself, who in dark times lived their lives in hope and faith ,despite falling into the hands of God, just as Jesus, ‘the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ also did.

Yet in our reading to day from chapter 12 the writer speaks of events during the Exodus, when even Moses, meeting God on Mt Sinai, a dark and dangerous mountain, was afraid. it was a difficult place and Moses, the great liberator and leader of the people admitted that he was exceedingly afraid and trembling before God **but he was still able to stand before God** . His faith in God's providence was sufficient, So the fear was worth it, as the outcome was the law ,the commandments by which the Jews still seek to live to day. The mountain, though frightening ,was a holy place, a place where God was revealed and so to today another holy place.

To Mount Zion it is still by faith that believers receive the message of Jesus “But, says the writer “ you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly<sup>1</sup> of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,” Still a place of fear, different, but still fearful and challenging, any wise person confronted by such holiness and glory might fear as a part of their response. Especially when God is described ‘as a consuming fire.’ But the Jesus we meet in the synagogue is not quite as we might expect him to be, though still challenging, but in different ways.

Luke gives two accounts of Jesus in synagogues on the Sabbath. Firstly, when Jesus announced his mission — (Luke 4:16) — he described it in terms of human liberation and flourishing from Isaiah “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the

poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" from Isaiah. Not the victorious military Messiah that might be expected but instead the one brings who brings healing and freedom and peace.

A much more challenging and costly vision, one which calls believers to transform their lives. In the light of God's grace, love and mercy. He had to flee for his life on that occasion.

This time things seem to work better; we know today's story so well. Again Jesus focuses on wholeness, healing and restoration which brings the woman peace. He lays hands on her, and she is set free and restored to health and immediately starts to praise God.

Despite the challenge from the onlooker Jesus is not trying to abolish the Sabbath commandment. In fact, he aims to follow it faithfully. There was a contemporary ongoing Jewish debate about how to interpret the Sabbath law, is the Sabbath for rest only and strictly no kind of work at all, or is it for continuing liberation, setting people free, as the Jews were freed from Egypt? Jesus's action connects Sabbath rest directly to Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt.

Her affliction has for 18 years limited the woman's vision to the ground in front of her. Likewise, her community's perspective on her has been limited to her bent-over back and the top of her head. Jesus heals her in front of everyone, which then allows her to praise God face-to-face with other worshipers. And with her restoration comes the restoration of her community. Her neighbours now see her more fully, in the end, "the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing". Wonderful things, but challenging our certainties, calling us all to a more open ended commitment, to join with Jesus in bringing fullness of life into our communities. After an encounter with the living Lord change is in the air possibly both joyful and fearful, but for all of us. Amen