

Epiphany 4 – Wesley 9am - 3rd February 2013Theme: “The call of God on our lives”Introduction

As I looked at the readings for today I realised we have three different but challenging readings and I've decided to use all of them this morning.

Hence we are going to have three vinaigrettes instead of one long sermon!

Also we are going to do some reflection and possibly introspection as we look at aspects of the readings.

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Jeremiah's call is one of those delightful accounts where the individual is on a hiding to nothing with God! God has a plan for Jeremiah before he was even formed in the womb. That thought is a little frightening when you think of the odds of conception let alone anything else! Yet the Lord says: “.....before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” vs 5

It is then that Jeremiah comes up with his excuses NOT to do what God is asking.

Jeremiah says – I do not know how to speak I am only a child

We do not know whether Jeremiah is literally saying he is young and not a good speaker or metaphorically is saying to God –‘this is not my area of expertise, pick some-one else who has more faith, is more mature in their faith and is a better speaker.’

Now in the area of faith, if God or maybe some-one in our faith community came to you and said, ‘I think I have just the job for you to do in our church community’ what may be our excuses?

1. Too young
2. No experience
3. Scared stiff at the thought of doing that task
4. Might fail therefore won't try
5. Others might think I'm not the right person or not doing it the 'right' way!
6. Some-one else should be doing this, NOT me!
7. Pick on some-one else God!

You may have some more of your own to add? Think about this for a few moments. Why do we not do things that are put on our hearts?

What was God's response to Jeremiah's excuses?

“Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth.” vss 8/9

Do we take heart that we will be strengthened for whatever task we are given to do in the name of God? Maybe not always but today this reading is an encouragement for us to ‘take on’ may be not the easy task but the task we feel called to. In our 9am congregation we are struggling for a new elder, we are looking for people to share with the Junior Youth during our worship time as well as to support, encourage and help lead the Youth Group let alone other new ventures! The call of God may well be upon our lives today.

Luke 4: 21-30

Last Sunday we looked at the mission of Jesus as he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah from chapter 61:1-2 quoted here in Luke 4:18-19. He is in his home town of Nazareth and initially the people are astounded with his teaching and we read “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.” vs22

However Jesus goes on to show the graciousness of God beyond the select people of Israel showing that God found favour with others who were not Jews.

Jesus quotes two instances from the Hebrew scripture to back up his words:

1. Elijah went to the widow Zaraphath in the region of Sidon in 1Kings 17:1-15 when he easily could have gone to a Jewish widow
2. Elisha cleansed the Syrian leper Naaman when there were plenty of Israelite lepers he could have cleansed

The point Jesus is making is that when God's people rejected God's messenger then God sent them to the Gentiles and so it will be again if Jesus is not accepted.

Jesus' teaching infuriated the locals and they drove him out of town as if to kill him. This is placed at the beginning of Luke's account of the ministry of Jesus as a forerunner as to what will happen to Jesus. He will be killed in a sense by his own.

How do we cope with opposition to our faith? Does it hurt? Does it stop us from sharing what we believe and why we believe?

1 Corinthians 3: 1-13

The third of our trilogy of readings. This could be titled "The Power of Love".

We need to remember the setting of this reading.

Paul has been addressing a group of Christians, young in their faith, who have been tearing their little group apart by their differences and not being accepting of one another. This is part of a pastoral letter to the church at Corinth that probably circulated around the churches of Asia Minor so ended up being read in various small Christian gatherings. So often we read these words in isolation (such as at weddings like I did yesterday) and not in context.

Paul reminds the people that every aspect of their lives needs to be based on the 'agape' love, wanting the best for each other in the name of Christ. The church in Corinth is called to look at themselves in the light of God's love through Christ and reflect that love to and for one another. So possibly, not unlike those in the synagogue in Nazareth who heard Jesus' words, the Corinthians would more likely have responded with gasps of anger and shock rather than 'ahs' of affirmation and delight. Why? Because these were words of challenge to the way they were living their lives within their community of faith as well as towards people outside their faith community.

Paul is not saying something 'nice' he is actually challenging them on their lack of love towards one another and the wider community. How can anyone come to know the love of God through Christ when we as Christians do not practice that love? What a challenge! How provocative when you look at the context and then transfer that to us today!

Love does NOT envy. Love does NOT boast. Love is NOT 'puffed up' or proud. Love is NOT shameful. Love is NOT 'self-seeking'. Love does NOT delight in injustice.

Paul is saying to us to show this Christ-like love to all. Often we fail to show that love and that is why we have our prayers of confession, usually near the beginning of worship so cleansed we can more fully hear and participate fully in the worship and praise of our God.

Two questions to reflect upon: How do we show the love of Christ?

How might we better show the love of Christ?

Prayer

Sovereign God, you choose us to participate in your holy ministry. Your call upon our life is a great gift indeed. It comes, not because we have what it takes, but because you are God.

Awakening to your call, when it comes, is a tongue-tying experience that also can bring opposition that Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul all experienced.

Provide us with the words to say, the appropriate actions to do and an inclination to respond to your divine summons. Let us not be afraid but put our trust in you. Amen.