

Pentecost 14 – 9am & 10.30am Wesley Uniting – 25th August 2013

Theme: “The Call of God”

Reading: Jeremiah 1: 4-10

Text: ‘Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me. “Now, I have put my words in your mouth.”
(Jeremiah 1: 9)

Introduction

When I was at high school in Adelaide, we had a class roll call at roughly 8.50am each day with our class teacher. To try to make it more interesting we had a variety of ways of saying ‘Present, sir’, as nearly all of our teachers were male, being a boys’ school.

One person in our class was nearly always late, arriving anywhere between 9 and 10 o’clock. I am certain the later he was the more imaginative was his excuse. It became a ‘bit of a game’ between himself and the class teacher which lasted for most of our high school years. Any amount of detention didn’t deter his lateness and his excuses were sometimes quite hilarious, to the point where we all would wait for him to arrive to hear the latest instalment of his excuses. One I remember well. The first period was religious instruction and we had the Rev Kelly attempting to give 30 rowdy 15 year old boys some sort of Christian instruction. In wanders Mark in his quite unhurried way and sits down as he is asked, “Well what is your excuse this time?” Mark replies ‘matter-of-factly’; “I was actually on time this morning sir, when unexpectedly as I alighted from the train a rabbi asked directions to the local synagogue. He said he was from interstate and was visiting. Naturally, being a man of God, I went out of my way to help him. As a Protestant I didn’t know where the synagogue in Adelaide was so I took him to the police station. There they gave him directions to Pirie Street and as he wasn’t sure where that was I walked with him to make sure he found it. When we got there he invited me in to say ‘thank you’ and I felt obliged to do that. Hence that is why I am an hour late sir. I have been doing my Christian and civic duty!” The Rev Kelly found it very difficult to contradict this excuse for Mark’s tardiness!

Jeremiah’s excuses

Jeremiah had two excuses to God for not being able to fulfil what was being asked of him.

However before these excuses we read:

“The word of the Lord came to me (Jeremiah) saying,” vs 4

This is the most common way of introducing the fact that God is about to speak a divine oracle to some-one and is found at the start of many of the prophetic books including Ezekiel, Jonah, Haggai, Zechariah and Micah to mention a few. We also know the time setting by the introductory verses of this passage in Jeremiah;

“The word of the Lord came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah
.....” vs 2

Historians tell us this is the year 626 BC, during the reign of the last goodly and Godly king Josiah’s reign over Judah. Jeremiah sympathised with and supported his attempts at spiritual reformation and renewal.

But here we also have the amazing words of the Lord:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” vs 5

Here we have Jeremiah 'chosen' by God in the womb to be a prophet. A prophet is literally 'one who has been called to be God's spokesperson', in this instance, to the nations, including Judah.

Now come the excuses: - Jeremiah says he is too young and
he doesn't know 'how to speak'.

Inexperience and lack of public speaking are good reasons for NOT being a prophet. However, the Sovereign Lord counters the excuses by saying:

"You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you." Vss 7b-8

Bad luck Jeremiah, your excuses were not good enough from stopping the Lord calling you to be a prophet. Then the Lord commissions Jeremiah for his task:

'Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth."' Vs9

Hence the commissioning backs up and continues the theme that Jeremiah will speak the words given to him by God. Literally he is to become the voice of God for the 'would be' people of God.

This prophetic voice is one still needed today.

What are our excuses?

What are some of the excuses we come up with when asked to do things for God?

- That's not me
- I don't have those skills
- I can't speak very well about faith things
- Don't have the time/too busy
- Not very good with people
- We're often away
- I'm not very good with children/youth/seniors
- Have other priorities at the moment

At the dinner for Christians for an Ethical Society the other week we had Ted Evans speak about his time as head of Treasury and then Chairperson of WESTPAC. It was a fascinating to listen to Ted and him share a little about his faith. He is a Uniting Church person in a local congregation and I loved his 'one liner' towards the end when he said, 'I was asked by my local minister recently to be the parish treasurer. What could I say but 'Yes, Minister!'

We are called to think about our faith – to look at the needs around us and to look at what you God may be calling us to do in our faith journeying. We have heard a little of Joan and Colin's stories that have led them to volunteering within Uniting World. Where and how is God calling us?

Prayer

Like Jeremiah, we often think that we have very little to offer; a squeaky voice, an inadequate vocabulary of substance and truth. Help us, our God, in this moment to rise to the occasion, offering all that we have and all that we are, in your mission of love to the world. Amen.