

## 2022 01 30 – Called to Speak

**Jeremiah 1:4-10**

**Luke: 4:21-30** (The Inclusive Bible)

Jeremiah was a young man, when he heard the word of YHWH saying, “Before I formed you in the womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I dedicated you. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” The fact that Jeremiah heard those words would certainly lead us to believe that he was listening, that he was aware of the presence of God, (or YHWH) in his life. We don’t know much about Jeremiah’s upbringing except that he was an Israelite from the tribe a Benjamin, and he was a descendant of one of the chief priests of David. I think it’s safe to say that prayer was a part of his culture, his way of being.

If we consider [Julian of Norwich’s body prayer](#)—the one that I introduced during our Community Learning Time—it’s clear that Jeremiah had already included the first posture or intention, await, in his spiritual practice. He was obviously awaiting God’s presence however it would come to him. We don’t know how YHWH’s words came to Jeremiah. It could have been a dream or vision, or an answer to prayer. Moses heard God’s voice coming from a burning bush, Samuel heard God’s voice while he was asleep and Jesus heard God’s voice while being baptized in the Jordan River.

As individuals we all experience God’s presence in different ways and at different times. The comfort and wisdom of the Holy Mystery is present in ourselves, in the people around us, in worship and in creation. I have heard the voice of God in a dream, a phone call, while reading a book, watching a movie, talking to a

friend, worshipping in a church and often while spending time in nature. There is no right or wrong time to experience God in our lives. We just need to be ready to feel, to see, and to listen.

And, like Jeremiah, we need to allow a sense of God's presence to reach us. Every posture or intention in Julian of Norwich's prayer has its own challenges. But this one, I think is especially difficult in today's world. We are to "allow a sense of God's presence to come ...or not...and be what it is." But there are just so many other distractions. There are so many ways that we can avoid or block out the call of the sacred. Think of all the addictive things in our lives: alcohol, drugs, gambling, food, social media, TV, Netflix and all the other streaming services. None of these are bad in small doses. But too often we use them to avoid reality, to mask difficult feelings, to evade the truth, to block-out whatever it is that God is calling us to do and be.

We all do it. One of the reasons we do it, is because we are afraid. We deliberately, or even unconsciously avoid God's presence because we are afraid of what the Holy Mystery might say. Maybe the Ground of our Being is going to say, "You're hurting. You need help. You need to admit that you can't do this alone." In today's individualistic and patriarchal society it's very hard to admit when we need help. Maybe the Holy Mystery is going to say, "That last decision you made isn't working out. You need to make some changes in your life." No one wants to admit that they screwed up and none of us like change. Or maybe we are afraid that God is going to say, "Your life may be going smoothly right

now; but I need you to do something for me.” Sometimes God’s truth can disrupt us when the status quo seems just fine, thank you very much.

This is where the wisdom of experience can help us. This is why we need elders in our lives who have gone through the upheavals of life. We need to be reassured that allowing God’s presence into our lives is always a good thing. We need know that God’s truth leads to healing and wholeness for ourselves and for others. As Frederick Buechner wrote, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” It is a place of new life.

Jeremiah allowed God’s presence in his life. And when he did, Jeremiah heard YHWH calling him to a new vocation. Jeremiah heard God tell him that he was destined to be a prophet. God wanted Jeremiah to speak YHWH’s truth to the Israelites. But when Jeremiah heard the call of the Holy Mystery, he assumed that YHWH was mistaken in his choice. He said, “But Sovereign YHWH! I don’t know how to speak! I’m too young!” This is a typical response: Moses also claimed he was ill-equipped, Samuel was too young to even know what was going on, and we don’t know how long it took Jesus to accept God’s call.

In Julian of Norwich’s body prayer, the third posture or intention is accept: “accept as a gift whatever comes or does not come. Accept that you don’t know everything; that you are not in charge.” This is another reason why we need to be surrounded by a community of people. We need spiritual guides who can help us discern our own truth, help us know if this really is our call. We need

friends and colleagues who know us and who can encourage us when we are uncertain. Accepting may not happen quickly. When I heard the call to ministry it took over two years to get passed this particular posture. I listened to the wisdom of the people in the congregation in which I worshipped, I worked with a spiritual mentor for over a year and I even took a 3 month sabbatical from my job at IBM in order to further my discernment. I thought the most important thing in my life was the security of my career in the computer industry, but God was telling me something different. If the call is real, the upheaval it creates is worth it.

In order to accept his call, Jeremiah needed God's assurance that he would not be alone in his ministry. YHWH said, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' Now, go wherever I send you. And say whatever I command you." YHWH even touched Jeremiah's mouth and said, "I am putting my words in your mouth." Jeremiah received the encouragement he needed so he could believe that he was enough, that he was up for the task.

The fourth posture or intention in Julian of Norwich's prayer is attend, "attend to what you are called to, willing to be present and be God's love in the world, however, whatever God calls you to." This is certainly easier said than done. In today's scripture, God says to Jeremiah, "Do not fear anyone, for I am with you to protect you. It is YHWH who speaks." I hate to tell you this but God's protection does not guarantee a lack of suffering. Some amount of suffering comes with the job, whether our call is to healing ourselves, changing our life circumstances, joining a church committee, or being a spokesperson for God. If we look further into the book of Jeremiah we will find that his suffering included flogging (20:2),

imprisonment (37:16 & 21), and even death threats (26:8). I'm not suggesting that we should put ourselves in danger of physical harm, but we do need to realize that following God's call is never easy.

One of the reasons I included the passage from the gospel of Luke in today's readings was because it tells us that even Jesus experienced rejection during his ministry. In this story, Jesus is run out of Nazareth, the home of his parents, the place where he was raised. Following God's call is not always easy, but it is life-giving and it does lead us to a place of deep gladness or joy.

This wonderful prayer from Julian of Norwich was written for individuals, but it is equally useful for groups or institutions, As a faith community we also go through the four postures of Julian's prayer: we await, we allow, we accept and we attend.

Our church, along with all churches in the western world, is now living in a between time, a liminal season, a time of waiting and listening, a time when endings are happening and beginnings are not yet. We are living in the posture and intention of await. This is a time for listening, listening to each other, listening to our neighbours, listening for the still small voice within each one of us. Our congregation's call is coming, but for now we await.

May it be so, Amen.