

## Love Can Be A Painful Higher Calling

Psalm 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

Jeremiah 1:4-10

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1:4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

1:5 "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."

1:6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

1:7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you,

1:8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."

1:9 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.

1:10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

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"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" . . . and from the Psalm, "it was you who took me from my mother's womb" . . . and from the Epistle, "When I was a Child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child . . . and the Gospel, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

The texts all make reference to grown people reflecting on their lives and seeing that God had always been a part of their lives and developmental processes. It hasn't always been an easy acceptance of God's calling, as witnessed by Jeremiah, when he responded, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." And Jesus was rejected by his hometown and driven out because the hearers could not accept his mission.

These people all came to accept, at some point, that in spite of everything, they were to place God in control over their lives, not their own plans, and often causing a rift between the prophet and those in his or her life whose love and acceptance is much desired. They came to accept that being true to God's calling was something they could no longer place in the background of their motivations but on the forefront of their actions. And this is a truth for all those who use Christ's name, not only for those in "office".

In Jeremiah's case, he was called "to pluck up and to pull down, to *destroy* and to *overthrow*." That is a great responsibility for someone so insecure. Anatheia Portier-Young, Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Duke Divinity School in Durham, NC wrote, "When we picture the hand of God "touching" Jeremiah's mouth, we might do better to imagine a jolt or a shock. We would be justified in

asking whether it hurt, whether it left a wound or a scar (cf. Gen 32:26), whether having God's words placed in his mouth changed Jeremiah forever."

Accepting this calling is always paired with a certain degree of pain. Let us put that in the "shortly before Lent" perspective. And yet, we can do no other. God is not without compassion and understanding, he promises Jeremiah, "I am with you to deliver you." Not because Jeremiah is such a swell guy and God loves him more than his other children, but because of the mission. God wants the mission to succeed.

For those willing to sacrifice their own desires and place God's will as having priority over personal gain, the word is, God will deliver us, but don't ever expect it to be painless.

While I was in seminary a favorite course was, "Moses; Man of God and Man of the People." The premise was, there were times when Moses was God's instrument - leading the people, reprimanding the people, defending God to the people. He didn't seem to really go after the job, didn't even think he could speak (which seems like a common theme), but on God's orders he turns against the family that brought him up and takes off with these people into an unknown future into the desert. Then the people moan and groan and he goes to God and begs on behalf of the people, he defends God to the people.

Later, when God is talking about destroying these people, Moses defends the people to God! Seems like it is a rare moment when both spheres of Moses' life are in harmony - someone is always whining about the other and Moses is the go between! And you wanna know what the scariest bit is about this course? The second part of the course title was, "Moses as Model for ministry."

I have always been told that Pastors can be the loneliest people on the planet. And it is because we are called to somehow float from realm to realm. I have this great desire to become more mature and grow in the spirit of love and compassion. I want to live up to this unbelievable calling. I want to bring people to a personal relationship with God, I want to bring peace and understanding, compassion and heal and help people overcome what is aching them. And I have seen my own progress in this and know that it can be done - and I have so far to go yet!

And then, there are those times that my heart actually aches at humanity. Like when I hear and see some of the profane stuff that so many people fill their everyday lives with. I want to scream, "don't you know how far we have to go yet as the human race?!!" And as far as entertainment goes these days, I can't take any pleasure in big time wrestling or comedians who make their living making references to their bathroom habits. And yet, when I hear other people

laughing and enjoying themselves, without the blockage I feel in my heart, there is a part of me that knows that I am an outsider – an outcast, and I feel like I’m stuck somewhere in limbo. I so want to be with everyone, and yet I feel excluded.

I guess that is how God feels at times. I really don’t think that God enjoys watching his children abuse each other, or to see how base we can get in our sharing with each other. I think God wants to be a priority in everyone’s life, sharing their joys and their sorrows. God is love. Love is patient and kind, not envious or boastful, or arrogant or rude . . . And when one feels called to love, it can be so painful to see how far away we as a race can be in demonstrating it in our everyday living.

Reading 1 Corinthians can also put me in that lonely realm. It is so grand and so beautiful – so clear and perfect a description of God. It is so perfect it seems unattainable. How can those of us who spend so much of our lives thinking about God, believing in God, following God, how can we face ourselves when reading this scripture. It is one of the most painful scriptures for me to read! Because I am NOT all of those things all the time! And yet, I’d like to think that I have loved and can love.

And Jesus in the gospel – he wasn’t exactly all patient and kind – he got his fellow Nazarenes so riled up they wanted to lynch him! What did he say to get them so mad? He pointed out to them that not all the great and beloved Prophets that are revered were able to be perfect. There were many widows in need of help during a famine, and Elijah only helped one, and she was not a Jew. And Elisha was only able to cleanse one of the lepers during his lifetime, who was also an ‘outsider’! And I guess the people saw Jesus words as blasphemous – sort of the mentality of “don’t confuse us with the facts we’ve made up our minds, we don’t want to face the pain of our imperfections – especially not those of our heroes!”

You see, the greatest pain of our Christian calling in reading 1 Corinthians 13, is seeing how far we have to go, because Love can be a painful experience. Love calls us to sacrifice our childishness and sacrifice for others. Love calls us to speak when we’d rather be quiet and accepted. Love calls us to accept our failures. Love calls us to look for compassion and peace when we’d rather judge others and boast.

That is why I think we all could relate when we read in the Psalm, “let me never be put to shame.” We all know this feeling, shame. It is the opposite of love. Love gives us the light of hope, and shame can keep us in the dark parts of our being. We may see in a mirror dimly and that is a blessing – who wants to see all

our warts while still on this earth and threatened by shame? And yet, that is what we are called to do – deal with the pain of being in the realm of love and the realm of humanity, and follow God’s call of faith, hope and love. Amen