

Taking Refuge in God, August 21, 2022, Jeremiah 1:4-11 and Luke 13, 10-17

This morning we received two messages about God's work in the world, through us, with us, and all around us. In the first one, from the Book of Jeremiah, one of the Hebrew prophets, we got a kind of coming of age story that reminds me that God, who formed us in the womb, speaks to youth and adults. "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. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.'

The second message, from the Gospel according to Luke, is a testimony that God communicates with healthy and strong people and with those of us who are bent over for all kinds of reasons and are "quite unable to stand up straight."

I also heard in these stories that God reaches across space and time to touch our bodies. The Lord put out a hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth and put's God's own words into his mouth. Jesus, doing God's work on earth, laid his hand on the woman's bent over and worn out back. I do not know if we are, as some folks say, spirits in a body but I do know that our bodies are precious, messy, and unique. The Divine is not afraid of or aversive to our bodies.

The message that is coming to me today is that God's healing and prophetic Word, is here and now, as the Lord's Prayer says, on earth as it is in heaven.

That divine and very human Word, embodied in Jesus and in other messengers, including creation itself, is all about freedom.

Of course Jesus reaches out to touch the suffering woman on the Sabbath. If this healing touch is work, as the leader of the synagogue says it is, it is God's work. God who worked 6 days to form and call good all of creation. God who then rested because freedom was in the air. The freedom of movement that Jesus offered the bent woman. The freedom of expression and proclamation that God put into Jeremiah's mouth.

God's work with us is to free us from everything that holds us back from living fully and joyfully on this good earth.

Throughout the Bible we hear stories – some about healing and praise and some about humans pushing back on God's gift of grace. Often, like in these stories today, they are mixed together. In some moments we stand up and praise God. In other moments we push back and dare to question when and on whom and how God sheds amazing grace. As in "Who are you to heal that person?" or "How can you work on the Sabbath?"

Years ago when I was just beginning my ministry here at Trinity Church, a member of the church who loved this place and wanted this church and his minister to be the way he conceived a minister should be, came to me in rage, demanding me, his gay female pastor, to justify myself before God. He needed to know how an embodied and very gay woman could be the pastor of his church.

I have talked about this before but today I want to say that this encounter was a powerful experience of grace that I and that member, to this day, both look back on. Each of us praising God whose love knows no bounds. God knew both of us, and consecrated us, to be exactly who we are. Loved, justified, and sent into the world to praise God, every day and in whatever way we can.

All of us here at Trinity Church, are on a group journey of faith. Some of us are feeling bent over so we can only see the ground. Others are questioning what God is asking of us, we of little experience and who tremble as we hear the call.

Here is the thing; you are beloved, just as every other created being is loved; just as you are. "Whoever you are, wherever you are on your spiritual journey you are welcome and wanted here, right now."

We are in good company. With Jesus, Spirit, and Creator. With those who did the work of the church in the past and are now our witnesses. With those who are being prepared for what is coming. We are not alone and that makes all the difference.

God said to Jeremiah, "You shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you."

God asked Jeremiah "Jeremiah, what do you see? And he said, "I see the branch of an almond tree." Some people believe that the almond tree signified springtime.

The promise of fruitfulness that comes in its own time.

The bent woman, healed by Jesus, as our picture on the bulletin shows, stood and looked up and all about. What she saw was the world into which she was born. Alive. Wonderous. A gift that is ours to receive and to steward.

We are not alone. As we journey onward friends, consider what you are listening to and where you are looking. When you see the Light of God, give thanks, praise God. Steady yourself for what is to come. Don't get all worried about knowing enough, doing it right or on the right day, whether that be the Sabbath or any other day. Trust that the Spirit of the Lord is in the place, blessing us, and leading us.

God is working. What we are being call to do now is to take refuge in God. Stand up and bless the Lord. The rest will follow. Amen