

The Battle That No One Talks About

Jeremiah 1:4-10
Luke 4:21-30

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Faith Community

Jeremiah was one of the great Old Testament prophets. A younger man, maybe even starting out in life, he hears God say some pretty awesome things to him:

***Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart.***
(Jeremiah 1:5, TNIV)

There's an 'aw shucks' moment, don't you think? Someone says that and you look down, a little embarrassed, but loving every bit of it. But then comes the rest:

I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.
(v. 5)

You did what? Wait a minute, pal. I know a thing or two about prophets, and you're not getting me into that. Besides, I'm just a kid, what do I know? Then comes the response that lays him out:

Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. (v. 7)

There are excuses galore, but most of them are just that.

Along with excuses, humankind has been equipped with an uncanny ability to either deny reality outright or make it appear to be something other than it really is. Case in point:

Years ago there was an "American Idol" episode in which a contestant came in appearing quite confident. After the small talk she started in on her routine. And she was bustin' moves, high energy, big smile, arms wide open for the finale, and it was terrible, painful even to watch. And she did not have a clue. Have you ever been in a situation like that? (Someone's gotta tell her. Are you going to tell her? I'm not gonna tell her, you tell her. I'm not gonna tell her.) That's when Simon Cowell, the barracuda himself, stepped in with all the tact of the Patriots' and Rams' front lines combined, and delivered the bad news. Her response, of course, instead of acknowledging what was obvious to the rest of the world, was to take great offense at his failure to appreciate talent. And we all wondered, how could she not know?

Here's another scenario:

Jesus himself, just starting out in his career, was baptized, spent forty days in the wilderness, and now comes back to his hometown. He goes straight to church, opens Scripture, and reads from Isaiah.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor....
(Isaiah 61:1-2)

Look at how the people respond:

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. (Luke 4:22)

Local boy makes good, and aren't we proud? Then the wheels come off.

He refers to a couple times in Bible history when God worked wonders in people who were different from themselves. Outsiders, people who were not part of God's original Chosen Ones. Instead, this Messiah came for everyone, even outsiders and outcasts. And just like that the smiles turn into frowns, and who does this young so and so think he is anyway, and chaos erupts:

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. (vv. 28-29)

You see, they were special people. Chosen people, to be specific. God himself said so and led their ancestors out from slavery and into the Promised Land. So special were they that the rest of the world was on the outside looking in, and they liked it that way. If you were among the Chosen People you could have nothing to do with outsiders lest you become unclean and an outcast yourself. And here's this guy who'd been away awhile and comes back talking like this, and we'd better stop it now before it gets out of hand, and this adoring crowd becomes an angry mob.

But friends, here's the deal: Jesus was right. He was quoting Scripture, which they certainly must have known, and maybe chose to ignore.

Friends, here's what I know: of all the battles we face, perhaps there's nothing more formidable than self-deception. Whether it's a reluctant prophet, a clueless contestant, or closed minded creatures of habit, we've all fed ourselves less than honorable attitudes, and we've all gone in search of information that backs up our opinions instead of thinking there might be a better way.

Jeremiah was certain he could not take on a responsibility even though God Almighty said otherwise.

Jesus told God's Chosen People that there was room at the table for others, referring to Scripture itself in the process, and that just made them furious.

Friends, authentic disciples always open themselves to God honoring insight and challenge, even when it's uncomfortable, and causes us to stretch in ways we never considered.

We go back to kindergarten every day.

We read.

We listen.

We watch.

We look.

We cannot do this alone. We must do this together. The world is watching, friends, watching and looking for a better way. This could indeed be the church's finest hour. Thanks be to God.