

I was told many times this past Sunday 8/25/19 that this message needed to go into the Messenger. So here it is, with prayers for us all. It is entitled “Voice and Bearing” and is based on Jeremiah 1:4-10 and Luke 13:10-17.

Kate

There are many ways to enter a gospel story...today I would let's start by moving into it physically. Will all of you who are able and willing to step out of their pew? The rest can try this where you are sitting. Now, please bend over as far as you can without falling over and hold that position for a few seconds. **How does it feel? What do you see?** ... You hear a voice that says to you “My friend, you are set free from your ailment.” Very slowly raise yourself back up until you are standing straight, arms raised. **What do you see? How does it feel?** ... Imagine eighteen years of holding that position! Okay...back to the pews.



I suspect that we are all relieved that we are not the woman in today's story! I was about to say “old woman” because that is how she is portrayed in artistic renderings. But the scripture doesn't say that she was aged. She could be 32 for all we know, bent down since she was 14. We may have diagnosed her with osteoporosis, but have no idea what it was. The verse says it was a **spirit** that crippled her, which opens up all sorts of possibilities.

So now that we've done it physically, let's enter the story a different way, emotionally and spiritually. Think for a moment...think hard...is there a condition or spirit that bends us over inside? What cripples our heart and ties us in knots, limiting our **vision** - primarily to our **own self**. What is it that we need to be released from? We could answer that individually, what is it in me? Or communally, what is it for our

church? Is there anything that keeps us inwardly focused? Let's take a moment to think about that...

Let's take it one step further. As the leader of the synagogue complains about the woman's healing, **who** or **what** would rather keep us tangled up this way? Frozen in our own body? Stuck and powerless in a congregation? Do our petrified and severely restricted selves benefit anyone else? In other words, what are the consequences of our lack of freedom? The **bearing**, the posture, with which we face the world makes a huge difference.

Now, let's go to Jeremiah. This reading gives a fairly formulaic story of a call of a prophet. First, the **call** is made by God. “Before you were born...I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Then, there is **deep resistance**. A spirit that cripples the called. Remember Moses was afraid that he lacked eloquence, “I don't know how to speak.” For Isaiah it was a sense of his unworthiness, “I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.” For Jeremiah, it is his **youth**, his sense of not being ready. In every case there is something going on inside the prophet that keeps them inwardly focused, tied up in their own stuff, which is what they see when God calls them. They can't see out into the world that is waiting for them at this moment. That is until the crippling spirit is taken away by God, with a promise they will never be alone. Only then can they find their **voice**.

If God calls here today, what would keep **us** so tied up in knots and inwardly focused so that we could not stand up straight and respond? Is there anything that cripples our lives, keeping us from facing the world straight on and open arms? A physical ailment? A sense of unworthiness? A sense of entitlement? Fear of inexperience? Our youth? Our age? A worry that we are not smart or talented enough? An addiction? A living situation that has bent us in

half and afraid, hurting our ability to be fully responsible agents? Or, in the case of a congregation, a **way too small vision** of our call to be Christ in the world.

We don't know what controlling spirit held the woman in the gospel for 18 years until Jesus released her. But it is important to know and name what robs us of our vision, agency, and power as children called by God before we were even born. There is **nothing more important** today than using our agency and claiming our ability as a people of the **God of love**, called to make that love the **true currency** of the world. Because, as you know, the gods of greed, violence, deception, hatred and destruction are running amuck around us.

The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, said Friday, **"Our house is burning."** And it isn't solely the fires of the Amazon rainforest, robbing the earth of its oxygen, that we need to stamp out. The flames of racism, misogyny, xenophobia, and raw cruelty are burning in our country. It is not enough simply to pray them away. St. Teresa of Avila is credited to have said: "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours." **Our prayers must become incarnate in the actions of our bodies.**

Now, granted, we may be battling personal demons. I have a few. For example, along with Isaiah, the first is a sense of unworthiness. Another is the fear of upsetting other people, and I have been told a number of times not to make my sermons too political. But I **cannot allow** that to bend me into knots in order to keep others happy. No matter how hard it is. I am reminded of the leader in the synagogue telling Jesus he should not heal on a Sabbath, when that is exactly what the woman and the moment called for. The rebuke was meant to stifle him and keep both him and the woman in check. Jesus responds, "Ought not this woman...be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" And should we not be able to name and fight the systemic ills of our beloved nation on a Sunday if they are keeping people bound and suffering?

It is important to ask ourselves who benefits if we keep silence? Who benefits from our inaction? And **who pays the price?**

If all the prophets of the Old Testament kept silent bowing down to their own inner demons, the only beneficiaries would have been the false gods of greed, hatred, violence, xenophobia, and cruelty. **Who are the beneficiaries of your silence and inaction? Of mine?** Who are the beneficiaries of the denial of climate change while our precious planet floods and burns? Who are the beneficiaries of the indiscriminate arming of the people while our children die? Who benefits from the stirring up of fear and hatred between ethnicities, those who practice various religions and people of all races and nations, while weapons of mass destruction continue to be built and the poor continue to be sacrificed? Who benefits from the obscene wealth controlling our politics, while oligarchy grows and democracy withers?

You know the answer to these questions. You know them deep inside. We cannot afford to live bowed by the spirits that cripple us anymore. Or with the fears that keep us silent. Right now, hear the whisper in your own heart: "My friend, you are free of your ailment." Take heart. Stand up straight and tall. Use your God-given voice. I have called you, and you, and you, each one of you a prophet to the nations. Amen.

Who benefits?

Who pays?

You know the answer...