

Rev Ken Wratten At St. Stephen's Church

August 21, 2016 – 14C Pentecost

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Jeremiah is called by God: Go where I send you, say what I tell you.

Hebrews 12:18-29

Not fear of Mt Sinai, but joy at Mt Zion- because of Jesus

Luke 13:10-27

Jesus healed the crippled woman – on the Sabbath.

God's invitation to wholeness is for all of humanity. Jeremiah was called as a prophet 'to the nations', not just to Judah. God sent his Son Jesus Christ to bring the Good News to all people, not just the Jews. It is a universal mission. But the reality is that God's invitation into a holy life – being set apart, making life's priority to bring honor to God, is not an easy invitation to respond to.

Jeremiah tried to argue out of the assignment God was giving him – trying to convince God that he was too young to be God's spokesperson to the world. He was a lot like Moses, when he tried to argue his way out of his assignment from God to rescue the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt– he said that he wasn't good at public speaking.

The author of Hebrews wrote that something important changed with Jesus. Instead of the revelation to Moses at Mt Sinai that filled him and those at the base of the mountain with fear; we have a revelation from Jesus at Mount Zion, the city of God, and that revelation is filled with redemption and love. Our call to serve God need not carry a sense of fear or intimidation. Instead, we are joining with Christ to bring the world to him.

Even with the presence of Jesus in the world, some things don't change. When Jesus healed the woman who had been crippled for eighteen years, the Pharisee's response was to reprimand him for disobeying a rule from the rabbis to do no form of work on the Sabbath.

Remember Jesus saying, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath? Mark 2:27. This Pharisee needed to wield control over the Sabbath. That seems easy for us to criticize, but how often do you and I find ourselves trying to control things in life that are clearly not under our control, but under God's control?

People who work with me have heard me say many times: I do not like surprises. I like to plan, coordinate, have things run smoothly, track, adjust, and improve things... God almost always has another idea. Blessings happen all over the place, but not in my way, and not on my timeline. My life is certainly not under my control, but it IS under God's control. Can you relate?

The redemption that Jesus brought does not lead to changes in the world unless there is a conversion, a transformation, a metanoia. Jeremiah had his conversion when God touched his lips, and promised to give him the words to say. Moses had his conversion when God gave him the staff that would carry with it the power to defeat Pharaoh. The crippled woman had her conversion experience when Jesus chose her, went to her, touched her, and healed her. She had not come to hear Jesus; she did not ask Jesus to heal her. Maybe she had become apathetic to there being a chance for God to be in her life. Her conversion lifted her head to praise God. After eighteen years of no relief, she had been given rest from her deformity; from accusations that God did this to her as punishment for sins; from separation from her community.

Jesus granted this woman a time of rest, a Sabbath she had not experienced in eighteen years. So should there be rules of worship that would limit us from helping people we have the ability to help?

Two years ago Susan Zaballos' father Nick collapsed during our 10 am Sunday service. By God's grace we have a team of nurses who worship here. Within seconds Nick's feet were on a rolled up towel; someone was getting him water; 911 was called; someone went out to the end of our driveway to direct the ambulance to our front door; the path was cleared. EMTs came in and saw that Nick was getting more alert. When the ambulance had left with him, I talked with you about whether we should continue with our worship. We decided together that we would worship, and we would pray for Nick.

The wellbeing of Nick was the focus of our worship. Meeting the real needs of real people takes us into the heart of meaningful worship. Meaningful servant ministry takes us to the heart of meaningful worship.

The Kingdom of God is meant to be here and now; not just when we leave this earth. We need to be in the business of rebuilding the cities of this kingdom to be places of peace and godly living; we are not commissioned to stand waiting until we pass over to the next life, to be handed the Kingdom of God... We do the rebuilding by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and by loving our neighbor as ourselves; the Great Commandment of Matt 22. Our worship is the celebration for God granting us that life; worship is thanksgiving for the support we give to each other in living that life, and worship is asking God to help us to honor Him in that life.

The life God calls us to is not easy. It takes giving up your control over God's gifts to you; it takes a commitment to make visible to others the Kingdom to which you already belong: the Kingdom of God, it takes being open to God transforming you. It takes you and me accepting God's invitation to wholeness. Amen.