

4 Epiphany – Year C – February 3, 2010 - Homily
Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30
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There's an old proverb that goes like this: "Be careful what you ask for, because you may just get it." I remember well when God answered my prayer, and how shocking and unexpected that answer was. I was trying to discern God's will about the work He had given me to do, and when I finally got quiet enough to hear God's response, I wanted to keep quiet about the whole thing. Part of me really wanted the voice in my head and the word planted there to go away, as if that would make what I heard and what I knew to be true apply to someone else. Yet, God has a way of equipping each of us to fulfill His will. For Jeremiah, no excuses were acceptable – the Lord God puts out his hand and touches his mouth, defining and preparing Jeremiah to be God's own prophet. Jeremiah was certainly not alone in trying to find a little wiggle room in what he knew to be a true calling from God. Moses and most of the other prophets are right up there with him.

Hands up now, how many of us believe we are called by God to at least one vocation? Everyone should have their hands up!! I pray that this is not a surprise to anyone, but simply by virtue of our baptism, we are each called by God to the vocation of witnessing to the Gospel message. Beyond that, God's specific call to each of us is often in line with our spiritual gifts. Our calling and our capacity to be fruitful lies in God's hands, yet we are still co-creators with God in realizing the call to the best of our ability. After all, we are not puppets in God's hands, but willing participants with God in desiring and seeking, in accepting, and doing God's will. However, that does not mean that our initial response is any different to Jeremiah's. As we reflect on this, what we find is that in most aspects of our lives, acceptance usually does not come without some struggle. We make excuses and God says, "fear not" or "do not be afraid".

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God in such an intimate and direct way. God's words of assurance are a promise of protection, as well as our own path to healing and salvation through Christ our Lord. In all matters of discernment, there usually comes a point where, whatever else others may say or do, we find God's peace at the core of our being. It is the peace that comes from God's perfect love driving out all fear. It is the peace that marks the difference between a call from God and some bright idea we may have had. It is also the equivalent of the testing of the spirits, because God's peace is a hallmark and gift of the Holy Spirit. Like many ordained folks, my own journey to the priesthood was not a straight path. Never doubt for one moment that human beings find all kinds of ways to mess up God's will, and yet God's will finds a way. For example, I began my journey in another Diocese where, without the courtesy of a personal interview, I was informed through a letter that they did not feel I had a call to ordained ministry. Nonetheless, I can say with confidence that I always felt God's peace about my call to this vocation. After I received the letter, I took the opportunity to speak with the head of that Commission on Ministry. One of his first questions was whether anything had changed for me after I had received his letter. I told him "no". Judging by the way his eyes widened and his body language changed dramatically, that response was clearly not what he had expected. It was obvious to both of us that he knew right there and then that the Commission had made a mistake. Perhaps not according to the guidelines and constraints of the Diocesan requirements, but most definitely

according to God's will. Incidentally, I don't believe that it was anything that I said that convicted his heart in that moment. Shortly after that, God led us to Arizona, and the rest is now history.

At the presbyter's retreat last week, we were sharing stories of how we all got lost finding our way to Chapel Rock. Someone who regularly uses a GPS, was telling us that one of the most disconcerting things the GPS ever did was to say, "You have now entered uncharted regions." For most of us, like Jeremiah, that is an apt description of how we feel when we accept God's call to ministry. A call unheard or unanswered does not mean that God is not still calling. Part of our responsibility as disciples of God in Christ, is to be vigilant and take the time to listen. Every single one of us can be pushed and pulled by God into a fresh place, with a renewed understanding, and sense of discipleship. Times when we struggle the most, or feel abandoned by God, are the best times to pay close attention. Why? For at least two reasons. Even when we are not consciously aware of it, we respond to God's call most often by resisting it and wrestling within ourselves. Secondly, because God has a way of bringing us to the end of our tether before redirecting our purpose in life, if we are willing to discern and heed the call.

Each call is different, but all will build up the Body of Christ in some way. God appoints Jeremiah over nations and kingdoms reminding us that there is no part of God's creation, which is not under God's sovereign control. Jeremiah is not just sent to the Israelites, but is God's prophet to the gentiles as well. What God says next is very interesting: "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." In human history, we talk about the rise and fall of civilizations: Babylon, the Greeks, Rome and so on. What we know from our experience is that the building of God's kingdom often begins with some kind of fall or humbling, and then rises as God's work of redemption heals and resurrects us to new life in Christ. There is an invitation here as well, to reflect on our own lives, our own call by God, and to give thanks for how God is working through us, and the life of this community to build up and to plant new seeds of God's love and faith. As we have seen this week, all our vocations, the exercise of our spiritual gifts, and our ministries are to be done in the context of God's love. Our salvation was achieved once, for all, through Christ's perfect love and obedience on the cross. When you and I stick close to the cross, or what we might know better as putting the needs of others before ourselves, we also remain close to all love, and all hope.

Amen.