

Sunday, January 31, 2016

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalms 71 (789 VU)

Luke 4:31-44

Set Apart to Serve

Next Sunday in the US, Canada and around the world will be the weekend when the most junk food of pop, chips, beer, fast food including pizza delivery and any sort of heat and eat food will be consumed. Super Bowl 50 will take place in Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. The football game between Carolina Panthers and Denver Broncos is a championship game for the NFL and millions of dollars for advertising have been spent so that avid fans will be able to watch every movement of the ball going up and down the field. The teams have won their way to be in this Big Game and grocery stores are stocking up on snack specials. The tv will be the focus of many gatherings and the refrigerator will be full. Chairs will be placed in certain positions for the best viewing and calorie consumption will be high! Fans of all ages are getting ready for this big game and all is set. The only problem is that 'if it were not for the fact that the tv and the refrigerator are set so far apart, many fans would not get any exercise at all.' That is the tv and refrigerator—are set apart ...to serve.

But this is not the setting apart that is our focus today—watching a football and being served food. Our focus today is It is what God shared with the very young Jeremiah when God spoke to him and said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (Jer.1:5) Jeremiah was set apart for a purpose. His response was that "I don't know how to speak" and "I'm too young." But God ignored this and said I have set you apart for a special purpose.

What was his purpose? He was to teach others and tell others of what God was going to do and how the people of Judah would be carried into exile. Jeremiah was young yet God called others to help him hear what was going to happen to the people. God would use him to tell others of what was going to happen in order that they would get on the right track for living God's way. It sounded easy enough but the people just did not listen to God and so they faced exile.

The amazing thing is that God still sets people apart- through dreams, visions, through reflection on His word and with God's still small voice. God sets people of all backgrounds and work experiences apart and calls each of us to do something at a specific time and place. Once this task is completed God will call you to another task for another time. This call pertains to all people for we who have answered God's call to faithful service are a part of the priesthood of believers. This priesthood of believers

includes those who have faith, believe, and answer the call to serve Christ because of a need to have God lead their lives. It is the church and its members who are called to intercede for the people in this world and bring all who will come and share. Everyone enters this priesthood of believers the same way:

1. They hear and believe the story of Jesus life, death and resurrection
2. They confess sins and repent
3. God gives them His Spirit to empower them to serve.

And this call to serve might be like others, unique to you alone, frequent or just a few times in one's lifetime depending upon what God calls you to do. But each time the call is answered one grows in faith and love of God. As a part of the priesthood of all believers we are different from others who have not experienced that voice, that inner beat of the heart or the calming yet overwhelming feeling of the Spirit and have responded. This response is what we would describe as how you are fulfilling the call of God. You are walking in the way of Christ and reaching out to others as you go. Yet there is something more – it is a feeling within that says you are willing to do more or something different. There is an excitement brewing inside yet you are not positive as to what to do.

Reflecting on this for a moment. If you have experienced God's initial call- Do you remember when God called you that first time to believe and follow? If yes do you remember how calming yet excited you felt? And how you couldn't wait to do something to help others even though you were not sure how? This is a truly wonderful memory—and for many this is all that it is – a memory because following God to be set apart was going to be difficult no matter where you went or what you pursued. But the reality is, that God's love for you never stops and unlike a telephone answering service, God's message does not get cut off nor does he stop.

If no-that is if you have not experienced God's call what have you been doing and thinking to block God's message sinking in or getting through? God wants us to live for him according to his ways. But if we close our hearts and minds to Him we cannot or will not. The reality is that God's will is stronger than yours. God's desire to be leading and guiding your life and more than you can imagine. He loves you. Or maybe you have not responded or declined his call because you are not fully knowing what God wants from you or for you? What is stopping you to saying "yes" to God?

Another possibility is that it might seem to be a while since God first talked to you and you might be sorting out what is important in your life. You are facing transitions and changes in your life

and you are unsure of where God will be in it. Maybe you have been feeling that you were pulled away from people and things that distract you. Or you might have felt as if you were put on a shelf and forgotten by God. It is during these times when maybe you have not been as active in your church life that you found yourself wanting and needing to spend quality time with God as he molds and makes you into His image. He will continue to build character in you. And there will come a time when you are face to face with people and their needs and you will be better prepared. This is how God will lead you to serve, set apart from others.. You are a follower and believer in God- Father Son and Spirit. You are called from others to be set apart and to reflect Christ's light through serving him.

In our reading last week from Luke 4—Jesus was in his home synagogue and caused a problem by stating that the passage he read written by Isaiah would be fulfilled in him. People there knew him and did not believe this about Jesus, Joseph's son. They were angry with him and they drove him out of town and even tried to kill him. But he went on his own way.

He headed to Capernaum and taught in the synagogue. His message had authority. And when a man possessed by a demon cried out to Jesus, he responded sternly. Be quiet. Come out of him. The demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. People who saw this were amazed and said to each other—what is this teaching? With authority and power evil spirits come out from those he speaks to. People are watching and seeing him – and are amazed.

Jesus then leaves the synagogue and goes to Simon's house where Simon's mother in law is ill with a high fever. The family ask him to help her. Jesus bends over her, rebukes the fever and the fever leaves. The mother-in-law gets up and began to wait on them. Later that evening people brought to Jesus many who were sick and demon possessed. They were healed and those demons which left shouted, "You are the son of God." But Jesus told them to be quiet as he did not want people to hear it.

We don't know for how long he was in Simon's house. But the next morning, he went out to be alone to pray. The people were looking for him and when they found him, they did not want him to leave. But he told them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." Then we read," And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea."

Jesus was already doing what God wanted him to do- he was sharing the good news of the kingdom of God with others. He knew he could not go back to Nazareth but he was called to share this message in other towns. He knew why he was set apart by God. Do you?

As Christ's followers we are strangers to this world's secular system. Instead of thinking and acting like the secular world around us, we are set apart to serve God and become more like Jesus. We should be like Christ and be alert and have self-control; to seek God's guidance in prayer and to let faith and love protect us as we live with hope.

Somebody once asked—if we are to do the work of Christ—when will we get free time? If we are set apart to do the work of the Lord, then we will not have time to get into trouble especially if our hearts are set on pleasing God. We should be working on being full of the Spirit and this is full time.

In this season after Epiphany we have reflected on the stories of Jesus being revealed as the Son of God—through the moment of his baptism, through the miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana and when Jesus read from Isaiah and told his home synagogue that he was the one to fulfil the prophecy and today how Jesus drives out evil spirits and heals a woman with fever.

As followers of Jesus we are called to be like him—we will not be able to turn water into wine, or have the doves fly and God's voice booming around us, but what Jesus wants us to do is be a servant. That's what he called himself. And having a heart of a servant is what God desires for you. God has been preparing you to serve others not for self-centredness. Without a servant's heart, you will be tempted to misuse your gifts for personal gain or to exempt yourself from meeting the needs of others.

God will test us and push us and while you may not be gifted in a particular task, you may be called upon to do it because this is where you are needed at the moment. It is your heart as a servant of God, a faithful follower of Jesus which will grow in time and with God's grace. Anyone can be a servant, but to be set apart for Christ's ministry is to know Christ and live for him.

How can you know if you have the heart of a servant? As Jesus says in Matthew 7, "You can tell what they are by what they do." What do others say about you?

Jesus purpose was to preach the good news of the kingdom of God because this is why he was sent. He healed many and those who listened were amazed by his teachings. Jesus was set apart as he is the son of God. But you who believe in Christ, are called to serve with heart and hands, voice and action. Come let us follow and know Christ as we continue to live for him as his faithful people set apart to serve.

Let us pray: Holy God, reveal Christ to us as you have done so many times. Help us to believe, to respond and to act for we are the priesthood of believers in this place and in this time, set apart to share our love with others. Hear our prayers O God as we offer our lives to you SILENCE. Amen.