

Christ the King
Narrative Lectionary Year 1, Week 12
November 23, 2014
Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD
Readings: Matthew 21:12-13 ; Jeremiah 1: 4-10; 7: 1-11

Before the Reading:

Today we hear from the prophet, Jeremiah. He was called by God around 636 B.C.E., living almost 100 years after the original prophet Isaiah. It was an unsettling time. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria. Judah would watch Egypt and then Babylon assert power over them. Jeremiah called the Hebrew people to repent from idolatrous practices and faithfully return to God's ways.

After the reading

Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen

A bit of music trivia for you boomers. Originally the first line of Three Dog Night's "Joy to the World" was "Jeremiah was a prophet." But no one liked it. So it became "Jeremiah was a (*bull frog*) — who could somehow be a best friend who was never understood but shared his good wine. Did we really think that made any sense?

Jeremiah's problem was that he *did* make perfect sense. He knew that being God's prophet was not going to win him popularity contests. He knew God was going to pluck up and pull down, destroy and overthrow AND build and plant the people of Judah... and it would not be pretty. On a day when the Lord told him to stand at the gates of the temple and speak to those entering, Jeremiah was about to let us all know just what God thought of worship that ended at the church doors.... and it isn't pretty.

Many of Jeremiah's contemporaries thought God would never let the Jerusalem Temple be destroyed — it was God's house, right? So if they stopped in to see God on the prescribed schedule and brought the prescribed animal or money, they figured they had an "in" with God and be safe, too, right? Wrong!

“Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, “We are safe!” Only to go on doing all these abominations?”

We may want to laugh at their foolishness. Come on, guys, did you really think God wouldn't care what you did the rest of the week, if you showed up at church on the Sabbath and made a donation? Did you really think believing in God was just about going through some motions and doing whatever you want the rest of the time? It's ridiculous..... right?

Today is Christ the King Sunday. Today we celebrate that we have a King who loves us completely, totally and eternally. Today we celebrate our Lord loves like no other king, for he laid down his life for us. However, Christ the King Sunday carries an echo of Jeremiah: “What is your response to such love, to such a Lord?” he asks us. Do we love God? Do we willingly obey and follow Jesus' lead? And does that love, does that obedience stretch beyond the walls of this church? Or, do we, like Jeremiah's contemporaries, forgot that God sees and cares deeply about what we think, say or do throughout the week? Have we in practice, put God in a box marked “church,” and ignored God's presence in other people or places and our lives? Is God king here in this space but not in our homes, work, decisions, families or hearts?

Prophets aren't easy to hear. Prophets aren't easy on us because there is so much good news at stake. The God who walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening in Eden, does not want to be a distant, aloof acquaintance. The Lord who started a people with Abraham and Sarah, two of the most, senior, senior-citizens, isn't interested in simply being an intellectual concept or an affiliation we check off on a form. Our Lord who rescued the Israelites from slavery and provided for them for 40 years in the wilderness, doesn't want lip service or love that is limited to a building and an hour. God wants a relationship with us—a meaningful, real relationship with us. God does not want to be a place we visit

or a liturgy we follow. God wants to be a real person who is a part of your life, your days, who you are and what you do.

One pastor I knew had gotten into a conversation with a confirmation class about what it meant to love God. Eyes were glazing over. You could almost see the “Blah, blah, blah, blah” coming out of their ears. Then he began to tell them about a couple who had come to ask if he would marry them. Eventually he told them, “The guy said he loved her with all his heart and wanted to marry her. But he didn’t want to spend a whole lot of time with her. He didn’t want to have a lot of conversation either. He pretty much wanted to do whatever he wanted but have her to come home to when it was time for bed or he had a problem. “What do you think I should do? Should I tell them to go ahead and get married?” They looked at him like he was crazed. “How can someone say they love someone but not want to spend time with them or even talk with them?” “That’s not being married if you don’t include your spouse in stuff!” “He’s just using her, pastor. You can’t marry them!”

“Bingo!” he said, “Do we treat God any better? Do we take the time to talk and listen to God? Do we begrudge God any time at worship or helping others? Do we only pray when we want something?” They didn’t know whether they were having an epiphany or a guilt trip. But relationships they could understand. They were navigating relationships with their parents, teachers, friends, guys or girls that they liked, siblings. But like many of the people Jeremiah was addressing, they hadn’t thought of faith in that way.

To the people of Judah who Jeremiah spoke to on the Temple steps, faith had come to be about rituals, not a relationship. Faith had come to mean a place not a person. Religion was a system you engaged on the Sabbath and in prescribed rituals but it was not a way of life in partnership with God. And many of us mainline Christians have to admit we aren’t in the habit of speaking about having a relationship with God either. Yet today, on Christ the King Sunday, Jeremiah calls us to think about how we treat the Lord we call Creator, Savior and King. In the waters of our baptism we have been claimed as one of

God's own children, unconditionally, steadfastly and forever loved. We have been bound to a God who is always there, wants to listen, will never abandon us, gives without keeping a tally, stays faithful even when we do not. How do we love in return?

Christ the King Sunday marks the end of the church year and points us to a new one that officially starts on the first Sunday of Advent. Most people will wait until January 1st to make a new year's resolution but I don't want us to wait. I'd like to suggest something crazy important. What if we each resolved that each day of the next month we'd invite God to truly be a part of our everyday lives in this very concrete way ---- In your head or aloud, talk to God like you would talk to a person who loves you. Once or several times a day give it a try. You may feel foolish at first but stick to it.

Here's how it might look. When you're getting ready in the morning, tell God about your day. When you're caught in traffic, tell the Lord what you think about it, why it makes you anxious, what do you suggest, Lord. When you're walking into school or work, try asking God where am I going to see you today? When you admire a starry sky or Christmas tree, give God a mental high five and tell God some of the other parts of nature you think are awesome. When wrapping the umpteenth Christmas gift, talk to God about the person the gift is for — why you love them, what they may be needing or struggling with in their lives. That's it. That's my church new year's resolution for us. I didn't take it to Council. I haven't checked to see if it's allowed in the constitution. I'm just boldly asking you to trust me and try. For the next four weeks, treat God as a person and faith as a relationship that needs tending and care.

What might happen if God becomes more real in our everyday lives? We may come to wonder how we ever made it without including God in our circles of relationships. We will likely find God closer and able to hear God more clearly. We may begin to see more of what God sees and love more of what God loves. We will likely find something has shifted inside us and our community.

I know you hear what I say in sermons but may often forget it by lunch time. But today, don't forget. I'm not asking for your time, but your consciousness, a deliberate daily habit. You may think I'm asking a lot. But hear God say, "Let me dwell with you in this place," in your day and life. Talk and listen to God throughout your day. Let it be your Advent devotion. In a month, on December 23rd, let's check in with one another. Just how might we answer the question, "How are things between you and God?" Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 11/21/14