

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Luke 4: 21-30

The Scripture verses this morning refer to several instances of people speaking: the Lord God speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, and Jeremiah speaking back; Jesus speaking to the audience in a synagogue, and ultimately that audience speaking back. These are just a few of what the concordance in my bible indicates are more than 30 direct instances of the form of the word “speak.” And that doesn’t count all the implied conversations that just fill the bible. In short, much of what we read in the Bible and how we as the church interact with each other and the world, is through our conversations.

About a month ago, Dick and I had the idea to have the youth involved in this worship service as a fill in. Weather had a big part in preventing that this morning, but be assured, we do intend to have the youth involved in leading a worship service soon. When we first brought up the idea with them, their reactions, like pretty much any of ours, is a combination of wide eyes, blank stares, and shaking heads. Honestly, that was my reaction to undertaking this as well – yet here I am.

Jeremiah’s plea hits right to the heart of the matter: “Ah, Lord God! (OMG!) Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” The Lord has just spoken to Jeremiah, outlining God’s plans for Jeremiah as a prophet. Firstly, Jeremiah would have been keenly aware he was being called to follow in the footsteps of prophets such as Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah. Talk about shoes to fill! Now, to put some additional context around that call, my bible has this introduction to the book of Jeremiah:

“Jeremiah prophesied in Judah (the southern kingdom) during the reign of Josiah and later kings, living to see the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. It was a period of storm and stress throughout the entire world. After Josiah’s reign, Jeremiah was often in danger from political and

religious leaders who were angry because of his messages. Through all this, God protected Jeremiah so he could continue to warn the wicked and comfort those who trusted in God.”

“Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” Indeed.

In what sounds not so very different from the world of today is it any wonder that the first words we have from Jeremiah could be interpreted as a reply to God that “I am not the prophet you are looking for.” To add even more pressure, we have Jesus even referring to a prophet not being accepted in his hometown in the passage from Luke.

Coming back to the youth for a moment, we have been watching a video series entitled “Drive Through History” that does a wonderful job of presenting biblical stories along with their contexts of place, time, and politics, as well as with modern archeological and other historical relevance. Recently we watched an episode that included Nazareth and the Reading of the Scroll in the Synagogue there.

A very important item to understanding the ultimate reaction of the audience in the synagogue lays several miles from Nazareth: the city of Sepphoris. This city was being rebuilt by the Herods as a tribute to the Greco-Roman society – a clear and unmistakable sign that Judean society would look to Rome. Sepphoris was only “an hour’s walk” from Nazareth – 2 or 3 miles – and many of Nazareth’s working men –quite likely Joseph and perhaps even Jesus - are thought to have worked in the building up of the edifices of Sepphoris. These structures would have included several pagan temples to the various Roman gods. Ultimately, those pagan temples would have been visible, and perhaps even the smoke and scents of the sacrifices performed there would have carried to Jerusalem.

Returning to the Synagogue story: Many in attendance would have just spent their week toiling on “unclean” projects. Stepping outside their homes, their senses would quite likely have been assaulted by the activity of Sepphoris. And now, Joseph’s son – the carpenter – has just told them that the Lord God will not only aid and comfort the other – the Gentile – but has even on occasion done so

to the exclusion of those “in the faith.” Is it really such a wonder that their reaction to Jesus’ words are to exclaim themselves: “Why you little....”

“I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” Part of what the Elders and Deacons, along with new members, share with each other, is our faith story. Those of you who have heard mine, know that it is centered around this congregation. I was born into this congregation, baptized here, served as an elder here. My only membership in a church has been here. Yet, in a big sense I can completely empathize with Jeremiah. Considering those who have been before me and alongside me in that journey, it is very hard to not consider myself as “only a boy.”

Now, be sure that I am claiming to be no prophet, but aside from momentary bouts of foolishness, how do we get from “I am only a boy,” to standing up here, to better yet, taking our faith into a world not too dissimilar to Jeremiah’s – or Jesus’ – time. How do we speak life into our faith journeys such that we do become the salt and light of the world?

Another topic of discussion in youth group is how can we change the world? Several weeks ago, when the lottery was “only” \$750 million or so, we imagined what we could do with such a sum in our Christian faith to affect change on the world. Of course, that did not happen, and after all, money can’t buy happiness, but there are other ways, shown to us by Jesus’ human-ness. We need to believe and understand Jesus’ human qualities and how God used them in a ministry of love. There is a connection between the human qualities of Jesus and our human qualities – It is after all, our human qualities through which we minister to the world.

What are these qualities, you might ask? Good question. They’re there in the Bible, but not necessarily highlighted as such. But here are several

Jesus experienced disappointment: Phillip and Jesus in John 14: 8-9

Jesus experienced tiredness: Samaritan woman at the well in John 4: 5-6

Jesus experienced anger: Moneychangers in the Temple in John 2: 3-17

Jesus experienced suffering: Jesus in the Garden in Mark 14: 32-37

Jesus experienced love: Jesus weeping over Lazarus in John 11:36-37

Jesus experienced empathy: The wedding at Cana in John 2: 1-11

Jesus was firm: Jesus and Pilate in John 18:33-39

Jesus was anxious: Jesus in the Garden in Matthew 26: 36-38

So, it comes down to: Although I may seem a boy in my own sight, and I do not know how to speak, still how does God use my/our humanness to share grace with others?