

Worship Service - *“Life Outside”*

Epiphany 4, Year C,

30th January, 2022

Jeremiah 1:4-10 CEV / Luke 4:21-30 CEV

Intro/Prelude [*In the Morning When I Rise*](#)

spiritual arr. by Wendell Walum, played by Annie Center

Call to Worship

O God of Change and Stillness, of Wounds and Repair, in you we find our sense of balance—a place to land and to breathe.

May we grow our attention towards that which gives life, and cultivate connections of community and care.

May grace touch all that changes us, and all that we hold unfold with peace.

May we gather in this space claiming healing as our birthright, and bring with us the medicines of service and compassion.

On this day, let us come together to transform ourselves to transform the world, and move like living water—ever adapting, ever faithful, ever full of all that can be. Amen.

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

As we gather today, let's take a moment to quiet our minds and hearts in preparation for worship, as we listen to the following selection by Annie.

Reflection Video [*O Breathe On Me, O Breath of God*](#)

Irish melody, played by Annie Center

Invocation

O God of Flesh and Bone, your Word echoes deep within us and turns our heartbeat into a song. May we linger for a moment in this embodied blessing. Let us pray: I invite you to rub your hands together and create some heat between them. Bring to life the movement of our Creator, the Spark of All Life, into your hands. Feel the heat you just created. Now place your hands on your chest. Feel the rhythm of your heartbeat, notice the warmth you brought to your heart space. Take a deep breath to simply feel yourself alive in this moment. Perhaps, imagine your heart within the heart of Christ.

Perhaps, envision your ancestors at your back, how you have generations behind you. Now once again, rub your hands together, and then open them up. Feel the coolness of air caress them, the wind of the Spirit hover over them. May this blessing take shape in you and all that you hold. May you enter this time with an embodied awareness of God's sacredness within you. Amen.

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.

In our reading from Jeremiah, we hear God assuring Jeremiah his place as a prophet and his duty to share the message God brings to him. As we listen to these words of the prophet, let's reflect how we share God's message with others, or what reservations may keep us quiet.

Reading from the Prophet Jeremiah 1:4-10 CEV

The Lord said:

"Jeremiah, I am your Creator, and before you were born, I chose you to speak for me to the nations."

I replied, "I'm not a good speaker, Lord, and I'm too young."

"Don't say you're too young," the Lord answered. "If I tell you to go and speak to someone, then go! And when I tell you what to say, don't leave out a word!

I promise to be with you and keep you safe, so don't be afraid."

The Lord reached out his hand, then he touched my mouth and said, "I am giving you the words to say,

and I am sending you with authority to speak to the nations for me. You will tell them of doom and destruction, and of rising and rebuilding again."

Scripture Video Jeremiah 1:4-10

[A Prophet To The Nations](#)

Lectionary bible reading

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning we give thanks to God for the progress Melissa Hinton has made in her recovery from COVID, and lift our prayers that her healing continues.

We also keep Harriet Koscho in prayer as she travels to Texas to attend a family funeral. May her travels be safe and uneventful, and may God give strength and comfort to her and her family at this time.

Let's also continue to pray for all, whether impacted directly by COVID or not, that our hearts show compassion and concern for our neighbor, and that we continue to make progress in lowering the threat of this rampant disease.

Let's bring these thoughts, and those we may carry in our hearts, to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God, you knew us before we took our first breath.
You uttered your living Word and brought forth light, love, and life.
You gathered us from the dust of the earth and called us your people.
You sent us into the world to proclaim your mighty and wondrous deeds.
You are with us even now as we continue our call.

Mighty God, you have done great things; who is like you?
You alone are our rock of refuge.
You alone are our strong fortress.
You alone are our hope and in you alone is our trust.

Merciful God, your love never ends.
We confess to you that we do not always share your love as we should.
Where you have called us to live as one body, we exist as divided members.
Where you have called us to give our Spirit-given gifts, we ignore your call.
Where you have called us to forgive, we have forgotten your mercy.

Gracious God, do not be far from us!
Strengthen us that we might be givers of your grace and
may your steadfast love be known to all of your children.
Send your Holy Spirit to empower our hands to
clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and love all as you have first loved us.

Loving God, hear today the prayers that we lift up to you.
Be with those of us who are [*name of community*].
Give us hearts of courage and songs of your grace
to tell others of your righteous acts and deeds of salvation.

Abundant God, be with those of us that yearn for your restoration and healing. Today, we ask your blessing upon those seeking healing and wholeness, and restoration.

We also lift up to you those who we bring before you with our lips or within our hearts...

Faithful God, your power and your righteousness reach the heavens.

Hear us, your servants, as we follow you to the day when faith, hope, and love will be upon the lips of all of us, your children.

Lord, in your righteousness, **deliver us and set us free.**

These things we pray in the name of your Son, Amen.

In our gospel lesson this morning, we hear the crowd's reaction to Jesus claiming his place as the one spoke of by Isaiah. As we listen to these words from Luke, let's think about how we handle truth that may not fit into our expectations.

Gospel Lesson Luke 4:21-30 CEV

Then Jesus said to them, "What you have just heard me read has come true today."

All the people started talking about Jesus and were amazed at the wonderful things he said. They kept on asking, "Isn't he Joseph's son?"

Jesus answered: You will certainly want to tell me this saying, "Doctor, first make yourself well." You will tell me to do the same things here in my own hometown that you heard I did in Capernaum.

But you can be sure that no prophets are liked by the people of their own hometown.

Once during the time of Elijah there was no rain for three and a half years, and people everywhere were starving. There were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was sent only to a widow in the town of Zarephath near the city of Sidon.

During the time of the prophet Elisha, many men in Israel had leprosy. But no one was healed, except Naaman who lived in Syria.

When the people in the meeting place heard Jesus say this, they became so angry

that they got up and threw him out of town. They dragged him to the edge of the cliff on which the town was built, because they wanted to throw him down from there.

But Jesus slipped through the crowd and got away.

Scripture Video **Luke 4:21-30**

[The Prophet Jesus Not Accepted](#)

Lectionary bible reading

Reflection – “*Life Outside*”

So when you would color pictures as a child, were you someone who always was careful to stay in the lines, or did your artwork kind of meander around, in and outside of the framed picture? For most of us, as we develop and our skills improve, generally we tend to focus more on trying to stay within the lines, to following the expectation that we keep to the boundaries established to make our picture organized and appealing. We often carry this notion into other areas of our lives, following the expectations laid out before us, and adapting our behavior to “fit in” with the general expectations of our community and culture.

In one sense, having expectations is how we as a society maintain a level of order and civility. We codify some expectations as laws, while others are promoted as manners, or etiquette, to ensure we are on the same page in our routine interactions with each other. On a base level, most of this is based on treating others as you would want to be treated. I think that's in the bible somewhere. Certainly these expectations we often follow have good intentions and serve a positive purpose. They give us a sense of security and comfort as individuals, since we know what we should expect in most situations, and what to expect from others. As a larger society, these expectations are meant to ensure that the rights of all are protected, that we have a sense of order and safety overall. But does this system always work perfectly? What happens when individuals choose not to honor those expectations, when their behavior differs from what we expect of them? How do we react and what kind of treatment do those who defy expectations receive?

In our gospel story this week, Jesus proves himself to be one of “those people.” Last week, Jesus read from Isaiah 61 about the messianic promises to come, and announced that he was the fulfillment of those promises. In Luke's text today, this announcement from Jesus is greeted with joy and hope. When they say, “Is not this Joseph's son?,” there is truly a sense of pride in this hometown boy done good. Often we make the mistake of combining this story with the versions from Mark and Matthew, where the crowd cast a little shade on Jesus by belittling his background as a carpenter's son. That is not present in this version. The original Greek expresses positive emotion. They are thrilled that one of their own is being called as the Messiah. They are amazed at his grasp of scripture and the stories they've heard of miraculous healing down the road in Capernaum. They expect even more of the same, since he's among his friends, his family, his own people in his hometown. But that's not quite how this goes, is it?

He addresses their hopes and expectations in a manner they were not expecting. Jesus verbalizes what they are all thinking, “Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.” After all, that's the way it should be, right? They were observant Jews. They were here for Saturday services as I'm sure they were every week.

They participated in the temple system. They paid their temple taxes, their tithes each week. They were as observant to the Torah laws as they possibly could be. They were the chosen ones, they followed expectations, they worked within the lines. Yet Jesus goes on to highlight that their expectations are not correct. God doesn't stay within their lines. He gives them examples from the prophets of old where God did not work within the lines at all.

He relates two stories where Elijah and Elisha reached beyond those who “were chosen” to welcome those who were most representative of the marginalized “Gentiles.” Elijah went to the unnamed poor widow at Zarephath in Sidon, and Elisha healed the Syrian leper known as Naaman. The widow was obedient and faithful to God, willing to give the last of what she had in order for her household to receive a blessing from God. She endured the severe famine in the land and did not allow the apparent lack of resources to interfere with her relationship with Elijah. Naaman, who was initially resistant to Elisha's prophetic instructions, eventually immersed himself seven times in the Jordan and was healed of his leprosy. As a leader in the Syrian army, he epitomized the opposite of “the chosen,” a general in the army of the enemy.

Both of these examples represented the extreme “other” to those in the synagogue crowd, and they served to drive the point home that the good news that Jesus proclaimed was not going to meet their expectations, it would not fit into the lines they stayed within. In fact, he ratchets it up a notch to say that those prophets helped “none of” the chosen who also suffered, which sets the crowd off.

The implications are clear. Jesus isn't bringing a message of full endorsement of the status quo, he wasn't going to be within their expectations. In fact the message he was bringing threatened to dismantle all the stereotypes, religious, and social boundaries of those in the synagogue. Their initial astonishment and joy had turned to anguish and anger. The comfortable, safe and secure world they clung to was challenged. They responded in anger out of fear, and sought to destroy him.

Sadly, that's often the response to those who challenge our assumptions of what is to be expected, those who refuse to accept the lines that we stay within. Unlike Jesus, not many who find themselves targeted are able “to pass through the midst of them and go on their way.” These Nazarenes believed they had it all figured out, they knew who God was and made their lines to box God into their expectations. They were the ones who were “in,” and anybody not like them were excluded, not worthy, outside the lines. They were comfortable with that privileged status, “the chosen,” and did not take kindly to Jesus challenging it. Unfortunately, the notion of Christian “chosen-ness” is just as stubborn and can be just as exclusive. Once “Israel” became to Christians a spiritual community versus an ethnic one, and we became co-heirs with the chosen ones, in fact, even put ourselves ahead of that community, we all too quickly were willing to adopt that same attitude of exclusion.

Last week we talked about Jesus' mission statement from Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to

proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Yet like that community at Nazareth, haven't we developed the same lines to box God into our expectations?

We often define what salvation is, to whom it would and would not be given, and what rites and prayers God requires and finds acceptable. Like those folks in Jesus' hometown, don't we have expectations of what we find acceptable and unacceptable, our own lines that box us in and others out? Surrounded as we are by centuries of corporate life bearing witness to Christ's presence in the trappings of everything we think of as church, it can be hard for us to remember that Jesus most probably didn't imagine himself to be founding a church at all, certainly not an institution with the layers of history and doctrine often displayed here.

His point here in the fourth chapter of Luke is just the opposite of a church with lines and expectations. He makes the point that God does not stay in boxes made of the lines of people with expectations and insecurities. God more often than not works in the margins, not in the middle where we expect God to color his picture. The question is, can we step outside those lines as well? Can we find God at work outside these comfortable surroundings, perhaps even outside those comfortable doctrines and rules that we've clung to for security and meaning?

Like the end of our story today, Jesus will not be contained within the rules and restrictions we try to place on him. Jesus may pass through the midst of us, as the rigid Nazarene crowd of today, and go on his way to those outside, those without lines, to those who are open to the gospel he actually preached, HIS mission statement.

The God we follow doesn't stop working because we get stuck in our own ruts, God just moves on. We often worry about the decline of our churches yet are we willing to change to meet a God on the move? One who is not defined by buildings, or liturgy or doctrines? Will Jesus be able to elude the indifference to faith and religion that seem so prevalent today as he escaped first-century anger? Of course he will. God is always at work and Christ always points the way to that work. Our job is to find how to be a part of that work, which may not involve church buildings, Sunday mornings, or anything we have become so comfortable with. God works outside the lines, can we? I hope and pray we can. Amen.

A Call to Serve

Today, as you consider how you might participate in God's work, I invite you to do so believing that great things are possible for those who see great human need as a call to advance the love and compassion of the church of Jesus Christ. Let us be that kind of community, following in the footsteps of many before us.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or

online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. Today, as we listen to this beautiful rendition of the familiar hymn, *In Christ There Is No East or West* by Paul Demer, let's think about how willing we are to step out of our comfort zone, and how we might find ways that we can work outside our own lines.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [Video]

In Christ There Is No East or West,

adapted and performed by Paul Demer, text by John Oxenham,
music: African American spiritual, violin: Rachel Bundy percussion:
Chad McCutchen, **used with permission**

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God of loaves and fishes, of bread and of wine, we bring before you our diversity of gifts, knowing that they will be multiplied for the benefit of many. O God of resurrection, who makes all things new, accept our offering to both give and receive, trusting that there is abundance in togetherness, and generosity in you. Amen.

BENEDICTION

Beloveds, we have claimed our place in the ecosystem of the Spirit—alive, connected, and emergent with grace. Let us go forth from this fertile ground, ripening the wisdom we have found through justice, care, and compassion. And so, may the blessing of our Communal Creator replenish you today and always. Amen.

As we extinguish this candle, let's carry it's divine spark into our own lives this week, shining God's light into the lives of all we encounter. Amen.

Postlude

The Love of God

by Frederick Martin Lehman, played by Annie Center