

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany - Year C

100th Sunday of Pandemic - Online Worship Only

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6

I Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

01/30/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

21Then [Jesus] began to say to [all in the synagogue in Nazareth,]
“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” 22All spoke well of
him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.
They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” 23He said to them, “Doubtless you
will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do
here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at
Capernaum.’” 24And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the
prophet’s hometown. 25But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel
in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six
months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26yet Elijah was
sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27There
were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none
of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” 28When they heard this,
all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29They got up, drove him out of
the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built,

so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Called to Hope

Good morning! In the church we have a name for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that drives a person to become a minister. We say that the person has been “called” to the church. This begins as an internal “call” that pushes the person towards education in seminary and through their synod’s candidacy committee. As education continues, we talk about how the Church is affirming this “internal” call with an “external” call. This is complete when the graduates are approved for ordination, and begin ministry at a congregation or other ministry. My “internal” call is matched by the “external” call of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. Now, as far as jobs, or “calls” goes, I have it pretty good. Not only do I get to work with wonderful people and share in a loving community, but I also live in a rather accommodating place. My house here in Hampton, VA is about 5-10 minutes from the beach, and while it’s VERY cold right now, winters are usually pretty mild. Not everyone gets so lucky. You see, when you fill out your paperwork in seminary you have a section where you are able to fill out what geographic region and synod you would like to end up serving. BUT it also gives you another option to select “unrestricted.” If you select this option, you go to Alaska. It’s a guarantee. A friend in seminary selected “unrestricted” and ended up there. While all ministry calls can be challenging, I think it adds a certain something extra when the very

environment also seems to want to kill you. Between the extreme cold and long periods of sunlight or darkness, you have things like bears and moose to contend with!

Our lessons today are also about tough calls. In our Gospel lesson we see Jesus rejected in his own hometown. But it's the first reading I want us to take a look at instead. In the book of Jeremiah we hear about the ministry of the prophet by the same name as he works at what might be one of the hardest times in Jewish history. It was during his time as a prophet that the monarchy slowly declined and in 587 BCE the Babylonian empire came through, destroying the city of Jerusalem and carting off Jews as prisoners to the four corners of the empire. It's in the midst of this pain and suffering that Psalm 137 was written, and we hear the sorrow in the words of the Israelites: *"¹By the rivers of Babylon — there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. ²On the willows there we hung up our harps. ³For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" ⁴How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?"*¹ Like I said, it's a tough call for Jeremiah, who works throughout this harsh time.

But Jeremiah isn't the only one who is called. The church recognizes that each and every one of us has a calling. The Holy Spirit works in all of us to do God's work here in our world. We have more in common with Jeremiah too, because times are especially tough. I doubt that I am the only one who has struggled over the past two years. (Today actually marks the 100th Sunday since the pandemic "started" for most of us.) Some have faced the burden brought on by sickness and other physical health challenges. Some have fought emotional or mental battles as we try to

¹ Psalm 137:1-4 NRSV

accomplish our tasks in a world that looks vastly different from what we were used to. Things like loneliness and financial insecurity have meant that we can sometimes feel like we are walking on a tightrope. All of this means that we have struggles spiritually too. While advances in technology have made worshiping together easier, I doubt I'm the only person who misses seeing everyone.

So, how do we live out God's call in our lives in the midst of so much? Well, we listen to the words that God speaks to Jeremiah in our lesson, because God speaks those same words to us too. *"4Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 5'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you... 8Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you."*² Wow. In the midst of my own doubt, in my deepest darkness and pain, God speaks those words to me. *"5'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you... 8Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you."* And God speaks those same words to you too!

Now, here's the hard part. None of that means things are going to be easy. In fact, it's an invitation to work even harder. We see this challenge fleshed out in the Second Reading from St. Paul and his letter to the church in Corinth. Those words that we so often hear at weddings are really about the struggle of a community to show love to each other. It's easy to love someone when things are going great, it's a different story when things get tough. And that's exactly where we find ourselves right now. Have you ever had a bad day at work, maybe you're late in the morning, several things go wrong, and by the time you get home you have a headache? Then you snap

² Jeremiah 1:4-5a, 8. NRSV

on a loved one. What they did wasn't that bad, but it was the straw that broke the camel's back.

We are all stretched and at our limit. This means that we need to work even HARDER to show that love to those around us. This is also something we need to remember when someone snaps at us too. We're all worn a little thin, which means that we need grace to abound. I'm not saying to be a doormat, but I think it is important that we remember that just as we are struggling, so are others around us!

So let us never give up, remembering our own calling, and trusting God with the words spoken in our Psalm: *"1In you, O Lord, have I | taken refuge; let me never be | put to shame. 2In your righteousness, deliver me and | set me free; incline your ear to | me and save me. 3Be my strong rock, a castle to | keep me safe; you are my crag | and my stronghold. 4Deliver me, my God, from the hand | of the wicked, from the clutches of the evildoer and | the oppressor. 5For you are my hope, | O Lord God, my confidence since | I was young. 6I have been sustained by you ever since I was born; from my mother's womb you have | been my strength; my praise shall be al- | ways of you."*³ Amen.

³ Psalm 71:1-6 NRSV