

Ps 71; Jer 1:4-10; 1 Cor 13:1-13; Lu 4:21-30

Are You Familiar with the Carpenter's Son?

We often say, "Sure, I know him or her! We went to school together" – or "we lived down the road from one another growing up." We don't necessarily mean that we were best friends. But we are aware of the person, perhaps their family as well. Maybe you bought a car at his uncle's Ford dealership – or took piano lessons from her mom. The church folks in Nazareth were saying much the same thing about Jesus the day He read the Isaiah passage in the synagogue. "Sure, this is Joseph the carpenter's son. He used to play in the dooryard over there – and worked in the shop when He grew up. We know Him. Nice guy."

Contrast this kind of familiarity with what God is saying to young Jeremiah. Jeremiah was anointed and ordained to become a great prophet of the Lord. God told him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer 1:5)

Back to the synagogue in Nazareth – Jesus’ neighbors may be familiar with Him, but the Creator God knows Jeremiah and you and me much more intimately and completely than we can know one another.

God really **knows** us all. I am amazed at the times Jesus Himself looked at someone. He looked at Zaccheus, at Simon, at the rich young ruler (*Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Mk 10:21 NASB*) and at the Pharisees. He can see the entire life of the person He looks at. The Lord Jesus perceives much more than the physical appearance of these persons. He sees into their being – into their past and into their future. It isn’t always comfortable to be seen this way. But this is how God sees His people – all of us – knowing what we are and what we can be. God sees into our being and if we are willing, God never leaves as we were before we knew Him.

God speaks to Jeremiah and tells him: “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.” Then God touches Jeremiah’s mouth and tells

him: “Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (Jer 1:8-10) You know that you must pluck up and pull down if you are going to make a garden – the dandelions and dock have to go – you have to plough up the ground in order to plant.

Jeremiah was a boy when Josiah was king of Judah. Josiah was a good king who led the people back to the Lord. When God called Jeremiah, the young man didn't fully understand what hardships he would face as “prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah ministered during the forty years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile – l. 7th to e. 6th c BC.

After King Josiah died Judah descended into idolatry and wickedness and ruin. In the reign of Jehoiakim everybody thought that Judah was blessed. They had Solomon's Temple in their midst. They were prosperous – flocks and herds, fields and vineyards. They felt safe and smug. Jeremiah began to bring the message of doom. He began the work of plucking up and pulling

down – warning that Jerusalem would be destroyed and overthrown. They were not in God’s favor – but falling out of His favor more and more as they wandered farther and farther from God’s Law and true worship, and prayer and good deeds.

It is a fearful thing to speak truth to power. King Jehoiakim made life very tough for Jeremiah.

Why does God correct His people? And why do the people resist the work of the prophets in their lives? Let’s return to the 1st c AD. It is easy to gloss over the issues that were in the Corinthian church. The leadership was tolerating blatant sin in their midst. Factions were hurling accusations and insults at one another. Paul mentions their bad behavior, giving them warning and the opportunity to repent and change course. The Apostle Paul is God’s man – as was Jeremiah – and of course Jesus is God’s Man in the most meaningful way possible – God’s one and only Son.

Why does God correct His people? Why did He send Jeremiah – or any of the prophets? Why did God send the Apostle Paul? The biggest question is why did God send Jesus into the world to teach

and preach and heal and feed and nurture everybody He met? And then willingly offer Himself to shameful death on a Roman instrument of execution? Why? Because He loves us!

The people of Jerusalem in the 6th c BC wanted to hear words of encouragement – to believe they were on the right path – doing God’s will and receiving God’s blessings. The folks in 1st c AD Corinth wanted to be told they were doing right – even that they were righteous – going through the motions of worshiping God even in the turmoil of rebellion and disobedience. They were allowing worldly culture to blind them.

What about the congregation in Nazareth? Jesus reads from the Isaiah scroll – announces that all this prophecy is fulfilled in Him: That God has anointed Him, Jesus, to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set them free and bring in the year of the Lord’s favor. God’s favor is God’s love – deepest love that never ends.

Jesus could see right into their hearts and He saw that they did not accept the son of the carpenter as the Messiah of Israel and of the whole world. Their familiarity blinded them.

What does He do? He tells them that God's prophet Elijah shows special favor to Gentile widows – not only Jewish widows. He retells the story of Elisha healing the Syrian Naaman – a man of pagan and Gentile origins. The very idea that God loves Gentiles made them furious.

Jesus tells the people in the synagogue they don't even know the Creator God. The Lord is not their own private tribal deity. No, God is the God of all the peoples and nations of the earth. Why does the God-Man Jesus correct and incite the people so much that they try to shove Him over the cliff? Because He loves them with an everlasting love – a love that will not let them keep the favor and love of God to themselves.

God sent Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God sent the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and others. Then, God sent Jesus – at just the right moment to open the kingdom of God to whoever would believe in Him. Faith doesn't stop there.

So great is God's love for people – each one here today – that He wants us to walk through that door – to come into His presence – to be His sons and daughters – even His friends – forever. He wants us to live it out right here – right now.
Amen.