

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany  
3 February 2019

“Raising Prophets”

Fifth in a sermon series entitled “Inclusivity Matters”

Hebrew scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10  
Christian scripture: I Corinthians 13:1-13



Bob Hope once said, “I’ve found the secret of eternal youth. I lie about my age”.

Maybe the prophet Jeremiah should have done the same, but in reverse. In our scripture reading this morning, Jeremiah is most notable for his young age. Because of his young age, Jeremiah is highly reluctant to speak to his people.



The decision to speak is a difficult one to make for most. Insecurities reign. Even last night, I had insomnia because I had to speak today. We worry about what *to* say. We often agonize about what *not* to say. Perhaps we know what to say and not say, but we know not *how* to say it. It is often *how* one says something that makes all the difference. Also, we frequently unsure about *when* to say something.



The prophet Jeremiah experienced all of these doubts throughout his ministry. I have a feeling Jeremiah suffered much insomnia.





One meme I would like to show you says: “Welcome to being a parent of teenagers. Prepare for large amounts of eye rolling, emotional outbursts and thoughts of running away. And that’s just the parents.”

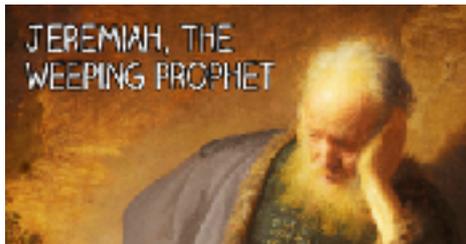


Another meme states: “I have no need for Google, I have teenagers that know it all.”



One last meme states that “Parenting is a lot like talking to an automated phone attendant. You’re hopeful at first, but then just end-

up repeating yourself and yelling”. Jeremiah feared he was too uneducated and too inexperienced to speak. No doubt, he felt that no matter if he spoke appropriately, few would listen to him as he had not yet the credibility, authority, nor legitimacy as a young person.



During the course of his ministry, Jeremiah not only wrestled with when to speak, but also what and how to speak. Jeremiah is referred to as the “weeping prophet” for he issued highly offensive, negative, and extremely depressing messages of condemnation and warning. If I preached what Jeremiah preached to this congregation, I would not have lasted more than a month before Council would feel compelled to relieve me of my call. Jeremiah not only described how the invading armies will defeat his nation and his people, he does so in extremely, and I would almost say, in appropriate detail - like, pouring salt, a little tabasco sauce and rubbing alcohol on the wound.



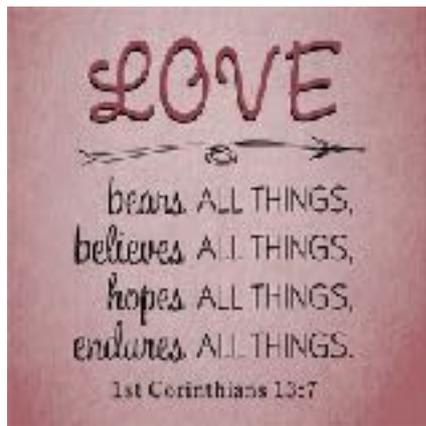
Jeremiah proclaimed doom to Jerusalem: “Hordes of invaders come from distant land, howling against the cities of Judah. Your defenses will close in all around you because you rebelled against God” (Jeremiah 4:16-17).



Jeremiah told his people that not only is the proverbial ‘pooh’ going to hit the fan, it is all their fault that it does, saying “Your own ways, your own deeds will bring this all upon you, this is your punishment, and all this comes from your rebellion” (Jeremiah 4:18).

Now let us switch gears quickly. From I Corinthians, we hear the words most commonly uttered at weddings. Here, Paul told his readers that they are all one body, that they all have a part to play. No one

part is more important than the other (our message last week). Paul acknowledged the many different roles people play in the ministry, but none are favorable or efficacious in God's sight if they are not done with love.



Love must be the foundation of all we do. Love should be the foundation for those that preach. My preaching is rubbish, if I do not love you. (Of course, while I love you, my preaching may still be rubbish.) The finances should be managed with love, not with a sense of control or power. If we sing, it is not to be in the limelight, it is out of and with love. If we serve, as we will the overflow shelter tonight, our service should be motivated from a love we have for those we serve (even if some are difficult to love). Greeters should greet, not out of duty, but love. Paul even said that one's prophesying is not from God if it is not born out of a deep well of love.



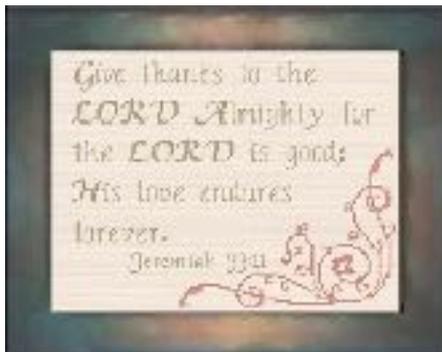
Paul concludes by saying, “There are three things that last forever: faith, hope and love; but the greatest of them all is love” (I Corinthians 13:13).

Friends, it is fair then to ask, well, for all of Jeremiah’s condemnation and weeping, how did Jeremiah exhibit faith, hope, and most importantly, love?



Well, Jeremiah bought land. In chapter 32, it explains how Jeremiah made a real estate purchase that Dart would have urged against with the strongest tone. The land purchased was under siege, indeed already occupied by enemy forces; it was a land devastated and worthless. Yet, Jeremiah bought it thus demonstrating faith, hope and, most importantly, love for the people to whom he prophesied.

Jeremiah preached about the land he purchased, “Yet in this place shall be heard once again the sounds of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride; [...] ‘for he is good, for his love endures forever’. I will restore the fortunes of the land as once they were” (Jeremiah 33:11).



As we conclude this sermon series on “Inclusivity Matters”, we are urged by our readings to listen to and invest in our children and our young adults. Some of their words may be harsh. We have heard them. I have heard them, from even my own. ‘Dad, your church Facebook is so outdated; the church should also be on Instagram’. ‘Reverend, the furnishing in the parlor are dated, they can be more contemporary’. ‘Council, the Riverside Room does not inspire our children - can we repurpose it and design it so that it speaks to and expresses our love for our children’?



‘Mission and Service, can we make our Open & Affirming status more prominent, more public, and more about deed than gesture’?

‘Deacons, can the sanctuary be better equipped to communicate with technology the gospel of Jesus Christ?’ I have heard all our young people, though they are few, express these desires. They are stated not out of bitterness, but out of love. Let us, as people of faith, respond not in defensiveness, but also in love. For it matters not what we pray, not what we sing, not what we preach, not what we teach, not what we serve, if we do not do so out of love.

This was the Word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, the people of God responded, “Amen!”