

“The challenge of Jesus’ way”

By Rev. Frances Savill

February 2, 2025

Readings:

Jeremiah 1:4-10, 1 Cor 13:1-13

For several reasons, including my retirement this year, I have been thinking about my years of ministry in the church.

Our passage from Jeremiah is my “call” passage.

Long ago, when I was struggling with a whole sense of what God was calling me to, when I just wanted to be a better informed lay person, a lady I knew only as a passing acquaintance, said God had given this scripture to her, for me.

She knew nothing about my questions, or my wrestling with God about going into ministry, but she came to me and said this passage from Jeremiah is for you.

And when I read these words I heard myself.

I had been telling God that I couldn't go into ministry; I was too young, I couldn't speak, ministers don't look like me.

And I heard God's response to me in the words God spoke to Jeremiah.

God said; "I formed you, I knew you before you were born, I called you to go and speak for me."

I had no more excuses.

I started the process to go where God had called me.

Many times I have gone back over those words and for many years I focused only on the positive words of the call.

God called Jeremiah to build and to plant.

But God also called Jeremiah to pluck up, to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow.

God's word divides.

It causes offence. It calls all of us as God's people to turn back to God, and learn God's ways, which are not the ways of the world.

God's word strips away our excuses, our well worn platitudes, and demands something from us.

God's word is a double edged sword that brings us the truth of our lives.

Very often the ways we live and think are selfish and are broken.

Embracing the values of the world around us, listening to the popular culture about how we think about ourselves, what is of value, what is the meaning of life, and what leads to the good life, leads to all the brokenness and devastation we see in so many lives.

God's word opens our eyes to the truth about ourselves and how we are living.

The gospel gives offence and if you aren't wrestling somewhat in your walk with God, you probably aren't hearing what's really being said.

Jesus is the light that pierces our darkness, but sometimes people love darkness more than the light.

Darkness can feel easier, it can be hard to face the truth.

God's word calls us to go places we would rather not go – to the broken, the needy, through valley, even through the valley of the shadow of death.

The gospel calls us to give up ourselves, our rights, our comforts, and follow where Jesus leads.

God's word tears down the idols in our lives, we are broken, our self reliance, our easy answers destroyed, and God's temple is built within us, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Those words are not just true for you, they are true for me also and I have been wrestling with them for more than 30 years of ministry.

I have been called to speak the gospel that causes offense to others, but for every one time you hear my words, I have had to read them and think about them and pray about them and try to live them, over and over again.

And I have needed the church, the community of faith to help me to learn what God's word means in my life day by day.

I have needed the support, encouragement and forgiveness of the people of God who I have journeyed with all through these years to continue growing as a disciple of Jesus.

And one of the things I have learned along the way, is that God's truth sometimes divides, and is sometimes difficult to accept, is only ever meant for our good and to bring us life and healing.

And I have learned that we ignore God's way and God's truth to our detriment.

God really does know best.

Our second scripture is one of those more familiar passages where Paul speaks about love.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends.

This passage is another example of a critique of our culture, for this is not love as we live it or know it.

We think of love as a feeling, but love is choice we make with every interaction with every person.

Love wills the good of the other.

Love acts with patience and kindness, not keeping a record of wrongs, but forgiving all, bearing with one another, never giving up. Love never ends.

Ultimately, we learn love from God, for God is love.

And Jesus lives a life of love, not a life of tolerance, or a life of just getting along, but a life willing our good, and calling us to life as we were made to live, life in abundance, life that springs to eternal life, as we learn to do life with Jesus, and be like Jesus and live as he did.

What Jesus tears down, plucks up and destroys in our lives are the weeds and the destructive habits, the hurting and hurtful ways in us, because he loves.

God calls us to life in his name, sometimes his word challenges us, and calls us to a path that feels very much like a cross, but Jesus' arms are always stretched wide open – in love, inviting us to follow him, to trust him and to learn his ways of abundant life.

It's a call I try to answer every day, to yoke myself to Jesus and learn to live today his way.

I don't do it perfectly ever – but that's not the point.

The point is to learn to let Jesus lead, to learn to trust, to learn that even our failures and faltering don't disqualify us, and we don't need to be afraid.

Jesus' call to us is not about our sufficiency, or faithfulness, it about Jesus' sufficiency, and about his great faithfulness and love for us.

I am thankful that we are all called on this journey together.

Thanks be to God.

Prayer;

Lord, may your Holy Spirit continue to speak life to us. Help us to hear your love, that we might also hear your truth. May we trust in your love and so trust your ways bring life.

Amen.