

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Old Testament, Year C

THE "ONLY" WORD GOD KNOWS IN GOD'S OWN WORD

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Analysis by Mark Marius

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; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." ⁶Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." ⁷But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." ⁹Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰See, 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."

DIAGNOSIS: Our "Only" Fear Will Destroy Us

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Fearing the Nations

It's a big world out there with a lot of ideas and opinions all undergirded by power, profits, and protection. Most of them have little regard for God's way of operating in our world. It's not easy to get one's voice heard, let alone to have the audacity to tell nations the error of their ways. It takes some courage and power to confront those in authority . A lot of times it's so much easier to keep our mouths shut than to upend the status quo. So we don't speak up and we don't speak out for fear of being taken down.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Only

But that is what Jeremiah and you and I are called to do – to speak on God's behalf to the nations. Who? Us? “But we are only ... a boy, a farmer, a lawyer, a computer programmer, a store clerk” (or whatever disqualifier you think is valid), we proclaim. But God says NO! “Only” has never been part of your existence. God tells us that we have never been “only” because God has known us before we were ever formed in the womb. The Lord tells us I AM, and I AM always with you. To ever utter “only” is to reject our relationship with our creator.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): We Are Plucked!

And rejecting the one who formed us, consecrated us, and appointed us is to suffer the same fate of the nations that ignore God's Word. We are plucked!...up rooted, pulled down, overthrown, and destroyed. God rejecting us is far worse than what the nations will ever do to us. Rejection from God means

God's refusal to acknowledge us. And not being known by God (becoming an only) is the worst outcome there is.

PROGNOSIS: God's "Only" Word Will Deliver Us

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Word Is Planted

Eventually God stopped giving his word to the prophets and instead planted the Word made flesh on earth. And that is the Word that fulfills what was spoken by the prophets that saves and delivers us. It is only this Word of God that was able to pluck up, pull down, destroy and overthrow sin and death by letting sin and death do the very same to him. And God gave new life to this Word that is the very foundation of the Kingdom it builds and to which we have been appointed.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Communion

God says he will put his word in our mouth. And if Christians read that through the lens of the New Testament, we recognize that being fulfilled during Holy Communion—God's Word, given for you, to eat and drink. And that Word is never given "only" to you but always together with the communion of saints. A reminder that God is always with us, strengthening us to get through any turmoil we may encounter.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Nothing to Fear (but God)

And so we proclaim the Word we have been given. We share the

good news that God's Word has plucked up and pulled down, destroyed and overthrown everything that opposes God. Through the forgiveness God offers, we are built up by God's grace and love which is now planted in our hearts. This is the Word the nations need to hear. This is the Word that will be delivered by all who God appoints—girls and boys, farmers and lawyers, computer programmers, food servers, pastors and parishioners. God gives us God's Word so we don't have to be afraid of speaking or anything else he commands us to do. Now our only fear is for a loving God who is always with us.