

**Epiphany 4**  
**3/2/2013**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**Jeremiah 1:4-10**  
**Psalm 71:1-6**  
**1 Corinthians 13:1-13**  
**Luke 4:20-30**

**Prophetic Call to Love All**

Sermon preached by Rev. (Deacon) Gavin Blakemore

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It is just on 2 years ago when I was inducted into the Community Worker position here within UnitingCare Hotham Mission. On that occasion the preacher, David Carter, preached a sermon which included this counter cultural line used several times: May the peace of God disturb you, I say again – May the peace of God disturb you.

As we come to my liturgical ending today this links nicely with today's readings from Luke which sees Jesus prophetic ministry begin in rejection at Nazareth. Now having heard Jesus declare the fulfilment of the prophetic call of Isaiah in the listeners hearing, we get the responses of those from his hometown but let's begin with the backdrop, the prophetic calling of Jeremiah.

The reading from Jeremiah gives us the typical biblical experience for a prophet. They are called and commissioned to be a prophet by a sacred encounter with God. Like many prophets the young boy responds that he feels totally inadequate for the task given, but God assures Jeremiah that he knows him intimately and that this was his destiny from before his birth. God commands Jeremiah to speak the words that he will be given and not to be afraid, for God will remain with him and deliver him.

That is Jeremiah would be given the words and would not have to rely on his own insight, intelligence. Instead God put the words on Jeremiah's mouth. His flesh was chosen to be a vehicle through which the word of God would become a living reality in the world.

Last week in Luke we had the first part of Jesus' appearance before his home synagogue. Now we read the response in this all important introductory scene for the ministry to follow. For the writer of Luke, Jesus is the fulfilment of this prophetic call by God when the people of Israel are again under the authority of a foreign power. Jesus is to call the people to account and continue to remind them of their duty to God even when they are subservient to Rome.

God's spirit is given to Jesus at his baptism and now we hear it is God's calling that Jesus will bring an all-inclusive message of justice and compassion. To bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and let the oppressed go free. We can't help but notice the similarity between Jeremiah's experience and Luke's story of Jesus reception in his home town.

The people listen to Jesus at first and were amazed at his words of compassion, then turn hostile when he begins to condemn their unwillingness to accept him as God's representative or hear the message he has to bring. Jesus is commissioned to speak difficult words to his people. Like Jeremiah, he becomes the 'outsider' and his rejection does not stop Jesus following his calling. He seems resigned to the fact that the word he carries will bring its own difficulties; 'no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town'. Jesus' speech to the people of Nazareth stands him in the long line of prophets.

Howard Wallace says that Jeremiah and Jesus both attest to the truth that the most difficult ministry for anyone is among his or her own people. Jeremiah's call was to pull down those things which did not lead to life as well as to build up those which did, and much of what belonged to what, depended on the social and historical circumstances of the time. So too with Jesus.

The fact that the crowd were ready to throw him from a cliff indicates that his message, what was fulfilled in their hearing, was not simply the message of healing they wanted to hear. This one, attested as the one who fulfilled the hopes of the people, was not what they had expected. Neither was Jeremiah called to be a prophet who simply gave the people the hopeful words they desired to hear.

Epiphany is a time when we not only celebrate the presence of God with us in Jesus Christ, but also a time when we discover both sides of the message our saviour brings to us. Christ is here not only to build up, but to pull down as well so that he may build and thus transform.

When working with children during Hotham Mission school holidays programs, there are times when I need to confront bad behaviour which often manifests as bullying of one child towards another. When confronted with their behaviour children tend to have various responses, including to deny any wrong doing, get angry, blame others or go very quiet and on a rare occasion they might even admit to their guilt. Then we explore how we might restore the situation or reconcile the relationship. Sometimes this is not an easy task as anyone who has been a parent, teacher or grandparent well knows!

Franciscan priest and author, Richard Rohr, in many of his books talks about the shadow self. That side of ourselves we might try to hide, not recognise or ignore let alone admit or embrace. We all have it and on occasion when someone calls our bad behaviour, our inconsistency, our misjudgements we too can respond in various ways calling into question the message and the validity of the person speaking the truth. Yet sometimes we know deep down they are right. It creates inner turmoil and our responses to it vary just as the children do to me. I think you are starting to get an insight into what is happening for the listeners who reject what Jesus has to say, otherwise the Prophet will identify the shadow self that has lead them away from God.

Shortly we will come to the point of liturgically launching the new parish structures. The fraud that was detected just over 18 months ago, has created a lot of uncertainty, anxiety and turmoil. We have had to also respond to the prodding by Synod to review our governance structure, policies and procedures and bring an improved level of oversight to prevent such an event happening again. It has not been a comfortable time or process and at times we have had to deal with some of our own shadow self as well as the shadow self of the Synod working out of fear and not love. We come today to a time in which we have done the hard work of discernment and ask God's blessing and your commitment to these new structures.

As John Smith and I finish up at the end of the month, the Parish faces additional changes as it seeks to discern ways forward by calling new people to leadership in ministry and mission with Hotham Parish. It's an exciting and maybe an anxious time as we pray and put our trust in God to provide the right people for the next phase of the journey.

Bill Loader says at one level Luke's message is simple and uncontroversial: if you join Jesus in living a life of compassion that is inclusive and without prejudice against the despised and feared, you will be living the life of the Spirit and you will be courting danger. If you start hating the sources of danger and thus dehumanising the enemy, you have become part of the problem, rather than part of its solution.

The mission and message of Jesus according to Luke are about undermining the dehumanising categories wherever they have been applied. This is not about a naive denial of danger where it exists, but it is about living out the freedom that love brings so that people never lose their value, are never written off. That really is good news also in today's world.

The freedom and action of love required are a gift given by God. In the reading from Corinthians 13, often used at Weddings, Paul is addressing a confused congregation over spiritual gifts. He is exhorting them that Love is not an emotion but an action. God's gracious claim of everyone is that we are known and loved by God and it is out of that experience of love that we share it with the world, even in situations of stress and conflict.

Let us hear the call of God on our lives to live out our baptism as Disciples of Christ. May you rest in God's presence and allow the Holy Spirit to discomfort, transform and renew us for God's work in the world by receiving God's love and freely sharing that love with the world in actions of inclusion, justice and compassion.  
Amen.

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