



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 4 (C)
January 30, 2022

RCL: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

Jeremiah 1:4-10

This early part of the Book of Jeremiah details Jeremiah's prophetic call narrative from the Lord. The context for Jeremiah's prophetic call narrative comes out of the Babylonian takeover and exile of the northern kingdom, of which Jeremiah was part, under the reign of Josiah (640 - 609 BC). Out of such brutal destruction, the Lord calls on Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations – that is, both the northern kingdom in exile and the southern kingdom. This call from the Lord is tender and intimate; the Lord has known and consecrated Jeremiah in his mother's womb, before Jeremiah was even birthed into the world. Despite this tenderness expressed by the Lord, Jeremiah feels a sense of inadequacy in being a prophet for both kingdoms against the extremely powerful and brutal Babylonian Empire. The Lord reminds Jeremiah that he is not alone and that it is the Lord who is with him to guide the nations in his prophetic message.

- Have you ever been overwhelmed by what you felt called to do by God? How was God with you?
- What prophetic message do you think needs to be shared in our own times? Why?

Psalm 71:1-6

The psalmist expresses a fervent plea to God for refuge. However, the plea also expresses the hope that they will not be put to shame in trusting in the Lord's refuge. This is perhaps a way to prick at the honor of God as well, as if to suggest that not only would they be ashamed if God did not come through, but also that God's good name might be shamed. The psalmist clearly lays out the threat of danger and harm from oppressors and asks for three things: (1) refuge; (2) deliverance; and (3) to be set free. In case the appeal to God's good name is not effective, the psalmist then butters up God with a reminder of their faithfulness to God since youth, acknowledging God's sustenance even before birth. The psalmist reminds God that their praise will always be to God.

- What are the ways that you ask God for what you might need? Do you find that easy or difficult? Why?
- How has God been sustaining you since before you were born?

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

This letter from Paul to the church in Corinth is in response to Chloe's report to him about some of the issues arising in their life together as a church. In chapters 8-10, Paul discusses ethics around eating –

should one eat the festival food that had been sacrificed to idols? In chapter 11, he advises on head coverings and abuses taking place at Eucharist. In chapter 12, Paul turns toward the meaning of spiritual gifts, because the Corinthians have become arrogant and dismissive toward other community members.

Chapter 13:1-13 offers Paul's vision of what it means to be in community with one another. For Paul, that vision is a community that strives to attain the highest of all spiritual gifts: Love. The Greek word used here for love is *agape*, the kind of love that originates in God. While not diminishing other forms of love at all, what Paul turns the Corinthians toward is the kind of love for one another that Christ has – love exemplified by caring for the well-being of others, even at great cost. Paul ends with the analogy of growing up in one's reasoning, making the point that, while we strive toward this Christian love now, we will have a fuller understanding in the next life of what love means with God.

- How does the kind of love that Paul describes here influence how you care for others?
- How does *agape* love help you love better in other ways?
- Have you experienced difficulties in your life together in your community? How did you resolve these?

Luke 4:21-30

In this passage from Luke, Jesus encounters the people in his hometown of Nazareth who seem to doubt his mission. Jesus boldly proclaims that, with his mission, scripture has been fulfilled right at that very moment. This causes some in the crowd to respond with a bit of snark: "Is not this Joseph's son?" Jesus spars back with two stories of great prophets, Elijah and Elisha, who were sent amid Gentiles that showed greater faith in God than the Israelites. This enrages his hometown crowd with his insinuation that their lack of faith in him is similar.

- Have you experienced feeling misunderstood in your work and ministry?
- In what ways do we label and judge others into narrow categories? How might this harm others in our community?

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