

21st August 2016

SERMON (WINSTON AND GAINFORD HC) Revd Eileen Harrop - Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 13:10-17

May our ears and hearts be open to the voice of God, giver of life and Father in heaven.

AMEN

In many places in the Bible, reference is made to people hearing God's voice. In the Gospel according to John we read that "Whoever is of God hears the words of God", and Jesus illustrated this by saying: "The sheep hear their Shepherd's voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out...the sheep follow him, for they know his voice".

In today's reading, Jeremiah heard and recognised God's voice speaking to him: "Now the word of the Lord came to me..." In the 6 verses read to us, Jeremiah referred to God speaking 4 times in personal conversation with him.

Jeremiah was also touched by God. He said, "Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth". In a similar context, the Prophet Isaiah's lips were touched and he heard God's voice asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

In this brief conversation and encounter, Jeremiah learns quite a few things:

He learns about God: He learns that God is a personal God who addresses Jeremiah specifically. God formed him and knew him even when he was still an embryo. God shaped him according to plans he had for him.

Jeremiah learns about himself: He admits to modest self-regard; he is inexperienced and not ready for responsibility. He says, "I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy".

He learns about what God asks of him: God will be putting him before people of importance and he shall speak as God's commands. God will be with him in his tasks.

He hears God's specific plans for him: He will be anointed with God's power to confront worldly power, appointed leaders and kings. Jeremiah will receive God's power to lift and to make low, to destroy and overthrow, but also to build and plant up.

What do we know of Jeremiah that God should choose to speak to him personally, to touch him, and have such plans for him? Alright, he is a prophet. And I wonder what image you have of prophets. Might it be somewhat like this: wise-looking (hmmm but what does that look like?); or perhaps weird-looking if he was like John the Baptist? Definitely a man, probably with a beard and dressed like Gandalf in the 'Lord of the Rings'? Well such an image conjures up someone extraordinary, and the implication that God is only heard, touched, and recognised by such people.

In fact, Jeremiah was an ordinary 'Jerry'. He knew a mother but we have no recorded details. His father was a priest and according to Jewish tradition, his father's ancestors were priests also. What is of particular note is that he was born and lived in a beautiful village, just 3 miles north of Jerusalem, encircled by the renown hills of Benjamin, overlooking the deep blue waters of the Dead Sea at the foot of the purple hills of Moab. He grew up sensitive to the blessings of this pastoral landscape and the association of godly families. That scene sounds rather like our village here as if Jeremiah could have been any young man from amongst us.

From Biblical evidence, God's personal encounters and relationships with individuals are indefinite and wide-ranging. God spoke to brothers Cain and Abel as well as Jacob and Esau. Jacob wrestled with God and had a dislocated hip to show for it. Until God's angel spoke to Mary, mother of Jesus, she was an unknown ordinary girl. God touched Naaman the great soldier and leper via the waters of the river Jordan but God spoke to Naaman through the faith of his wife's young maid.