

31 January 2010, 4 Epiphany

A New Narrative

Lections: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Ps. 71:1-6; 1Corin. 13:1-13; Luke 4: 21-30

In at least three of our four readings today we are offered epiphany glimpses of what one commentator has called a “new Narrative.” At God’s invitation Jeremiah is called as a prophet, a new narrative for his life that he resists. Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth tells his listeners that their new narrative should be based on love rather than the conflict and individualism that have marked their faith community. Perhaps more intriguing for us is the gospel where Jesus unfolds a new narrative which provokes such resistance that we wonder where the good news is in that. And since these texts are familiar to us – perhaps over familiar – can we hear a new word unfolding?

We have a tendency to think that God’s call comes only to those whose names are written in scripture or in the calendar of saints. And we also think that the prophetic role is one of critique or chastisement. I am wondering what we think God usually calls people to do and what message God is yearning for them to deliver. What if the prophetic word is love?

Most of us would say that we are all called to ministry and mission through our baptism, that God summons all of us despite our fears and our resistance. Someone once said that each of us has at least one sermon in us. Last week I asked you to imagine what the guiding text for your life has been. Now I wonder where God might ask you to deliver it. As a choir member or serving on the altar guild? In the midst of a meeting? At home or with friends?

I was looking on the web for the new narrative of the rally truck journey of Chris Stone and Craig and Dan, loving the twitter pictures and the cryptic words of their narrative. I am listening to those voices in the nursing home at Medex, to emerging voices of the members of committees of diocesan council, to those gathered this week to plan our parish Lenten program. These new narratives won’t allow us to avoid speaking or avoid being used by God who promises to remove our fear, to give us words of hope and truth. We are told that we will be accompanied right to the edges of what we know or who we know or even what we have know of ourselves. That’s a little scary and that is the good news today.

In an email this week someone we don’t know yet asked about our parish narrative on the website. Do we have a church school? Nothing is mentioned about the children’s programming. What should we be saying about how much we value the younger members of this community? They need to be included in our narrative. That revelation got me thinking and dreaming about their inclusion in our new Lenten program, one that you will be hearing more about for the next couple of weeks. After all, the children spoke a prophetic word of love as they entered our space after class last week with cookies for sale for those in Haiti.

Our old pattern can be plucked up and a new one built and planted. With house church/cell group meetings in Lent we can hear new narratives of community, of how God has planted a word in us or desires to release a new word in the world through us. We can resist that adventure based on our old patterns or our assumptions and judgments but the opportunity of deepened faith and community is there.

Those who heard Jesus declare his mission had to confront their own resistance to God's narrative in him. Their objections seem to emerge when he declares that he will be a part of God's prophetic movement in love for even the Gentiles. Those who thought they knew him and who heard him speak had certain expectations and assumptions about him and about God. A new narrative that moved their world upside down was not consoling or comforting; they wanted to remain the same.

We too move from adulation to assault when someone does not meet our projections or assumptions. We see each other only partially but we are called to a prophetic love where we can open ourselves and recognize the movement of God in each other in new ways. Resistance means a plunge down a hillside. It happened on the edge of a cliff, the edge of the horizon, the edge of experience. A 'no' to the experience was their response.

Curiously, Jesus slips by the resistance and moves on to the next place, the next edge of companionship. Nothing will stop him. God has placed God's own love for the world on his heart and on his lips. The new narrative will thrive in the most peculiar places among those who are willing to come alive on their own edges and the edges of others. Even now, even here, even today.

Amen+

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera