

Epiphany 4C

February 3, 2019

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.

1 Cor 13:1-13

Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face.

Luke 4:21-30

Jesus cited God healing Gentiles and not Jews in the OT.

(Jer 1:5) God said to Jeremiah, "I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations." To the nations... The message he was being sent to proclaim was not meant for only Israel to hear. He was commissioned to challenge dysfunctional human structures everywhere, so that the way could be cleared for the life God intends for all people. Jeremiah was sent—"to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (v. 10) – to any who would listen.

Jesus knew that the people of Nazareth would not accept the idea of him teaching and healing anywhere except to the Israelites. They were very comfortable with their heritage as children of Abraham and the people of God. They were offended by the idea that this was not an exclusive status with God. Jesus was declaring that he would speak about God to anybody who would listen.

Jesus reminded them about the prophets in Scriptures doing the same thing. During a famine, Elijah was sent to bring God's help and relief to a foreign widow of Zarephath (1 Ki. 17:8-24). Elisha, the prophet after Elijah, cleansed Naaman of leprosy; even though he was a Syrian military commander and an enemy of Israel. (2 Ki. 5:1-19). Their call to serving God included anybody who would listen.

The Epistle for today is the familiar love hymn of 1 Corinthians 13. This beautiful passage about the importance of 'love' is striking when we remember that this is not a poem about romantic love. Paul was admonishing these Christians to be 'other-centered', rather than self-centered. This is another NT passage where the word in the original manuscripts for 'love' is *agape*. There is no greater gift for Christians to pursue than to serve others with self-sacrificing love. He is describing HOW we Christians are called to treat each other, and anyone we can serve.

We serve others by being patient and kind, not irritable or resentful; always bearing, believing, hoping, and enduring.

Paul says that when we choose this approach to life, we will receive the most important gift there is. By giving, we receive.

Example: This past year Bob, Dee, Dick, Alice, Mark, Roz gave and gave to make the Memorial Garden a reality. Sanding, painting, digging, mixing cement, making forms, transporting patio tiles and a very heavy bench and an angel. Debbie told

the Finance Committee a couple of weeks ago that something went wrong with the accounting. The total cost for the Memorial Garden was something like \$20.00. Well... all of those things were donated. Patient and kind, always believing, hoping and enduring. Everyone on that project gave of themselves – and I know that every one of them feels that they received so much more in return. They have felt the blessing of being a partner in God's plan. By giving, they received.

Following Paul's teaching of being '*agape*-centered' -

We can help raise and educate children in a way that fosters healthy growth, and honors God.

We can be a husband or wife who serves our spouse and God.

We can do our day job in a way that serves our employer and God.

We can learn how to share God with all the people we meet in a comfortable way... Offer to pray for a situation, wear a cross. E.g., my ministry in the youth wing of a hospital.

Ensure that the programs we take on in this parish serve others and honor God. I hope you see, as I see, blessings poured upon this faith community all the time. We are NOT blessed in order to be a 'successful community', we ARE blessed in order to bring blessing to others. It is for this that God has chosen us before St Luke's church was born.

Jeremiah and Paul and Christ show by their own lives that God's calling is for us to serve others; both inside and outside these walls; even inside and outside the Christian faith. From before you and I were formed in the womb, before we were born, we had already been consecrated by God; chosen to serve – with *agape* love. Amen.