



God speaks to us each and every day, and in each and every context of our life. “Let those who have ears, hear.” It’s not always easy even when we do hear to understand. It’s not always easy to hear God- partly because we may not like what God is calling us to be and to do.

Jeremiah is similar to Moses. Both were called by God to lead the Israelite people. Neither wanted to accept the call: “who me, God? But...” In the case of Moses, God said Aaron would speak for Moses if Moses could not overcome his stuttering. In the case of Jeremiah, youth is not a disqualifier. Lack of specific words to say is not a disqualifier. God puts the words God wants spoken into Jeremiah’s mouth. Both Moses and Jeremiah were told that

God would be with them- they did not bring the Word of God to the People of God alone. God is present with them and with us, each and every day. “Do not be afraid, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”

Both Moses and Jeremiah were prophets for 40 years. Moses led the people from slavery in Egypt into the wilderness desert – what we commonly call the exodus. Jeremiah lived and worked when the Israelite kingdom, including Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon, were destroyed – and most of the people of Israel were forcibly removed from their land to Babylon- what we commonly call the exile.

Times of great turmoil – just like today. Times when the people grumbled and turned away from God – and prophets like Moses and Jeremiah were needed to remind the people about God. To remind the people, then and now- whether exodus or exile or our life today- that God is with us and God will deliver us.

The Psalmist reminds us of the same, ongoing and stabilizing and steady presence of God in the midst of turmoil: “Deliver me, O God, from the hand of the wicked, from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor. For you are my hope, O Lord God, my confidence since I was young. I have been sustained by you ever since I was born; from my mother’s womb you have been my strength.”

Exodus, exile or just plain ordinary every-day life. God is present. God is our rock and our salvation. Even the Letter to the Hebrews which passage begins this morning with doom and gloom ends with an acknowledgment that “we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe...”

And so we come to the Gospel of Luke and the story of the healing of the woman who was bent over and had had been crippled for 18 years. Jesus is in the synagogues teaching that day and when he saw this woman he told her that she was “set free from her ailment”. Jesus laid hands on her and “immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.” Jesus saw a need, called out for healing, and the woman- now healed- recognizing that the healing was from God, praised

the source of her new life and her ability to stand straight. And, as is so often the case, those in power- the leaders of the synagogue- criticized the healing. This time because the healing took place on a Sabbath day.

The Sabbath is a day of rest and rejuvenation, as commanded by God in Deuteronomy 5:12. It finds its original source in the creation story of Genesis 2:3 where “God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that God had done in creation.”

The argument of the leader of the synagogue was that healing constituted work that was prohibited on the Sabbath, a mandated day of rest. In current translation, the leader was saying that Jesus broke the law of God.

Torah is often translated as “law” and thus we perceive it as a black-and-white, rigid, punishment-based directive from God. Another definition or way of understanding Torah, though, gives us some room for thought about why Jesus felt healing the woman on the Sabbath met both the spirit and the letter of Torah.

My professor of Old Testament preferred that we translate Torah as “teaching.” Her position is supported by, among other resources, Torah Resources International, a website that offers a variety of ways for us to think about Judaism and the Torah in particular.¹ That website says: “The Hebrew word, torah (תורה), is derived from a root that was used in the realm of archery, yareh (ירה). Yareh means to shoot an arrow in order to hit a mark. The mark or target, of course, was the object at which the archer was aiming. Consequently, torah, one of the nouns derived from this root, is, therefore, the arrow aimed at the mark, **The target is the truth about God and how one relates to Him. The torah is, therefore, in the strict sense instruction designed to teach us the truth about God. Torah means direction, teaching, instruction, or doctrine.**” (emphasis mine).

If we think about Sabbath from the perspective of what God is wanting us to learn about a balanced life- one that included work, play, rest and worship- then it seems to me that a healing of a person on a day which is to be devoted to rest and rejuvenation is perfectly appropriate. Look beneath the surface of the language to the purpose- the substance over the form. Healing on a Sabbath reunites the woman with her community as a full, upright, person capable of carrying her own load and no longer dependent upon others for her life and well-being.

In the scripture readings today we have examples of fundamental issues: What does it mean and what is required to belong? What is the role of tradition in our lives? And, what is the proper role and use of authority?

Each of our readings gives us some insights into these issues. God is always present and we always belong to God. God knows us before we know ourselves. God can overcome any objection we can raise to the work that God calls us to do. This is not to say it will always be easy. God always reaches out to us- when we reach back to God as the source of our life and our being, we belong in ways that will sustain us our whole life long.

¹ <http://www.torahresourcesinternational.info/definition.php> (August 24, 2013).

Tradition gives us guidelines and helps enable us to evaluate the circumstances of our lives and how best to respond. Tradition, unexamined, however, can become a “concrete life preserver.” We live in a world that is ever changing; just so, we cannot blindly accept today that “we’ve always done it that way” and that’s the end of the discussion. Times change, people change – but the love of God for us is timeless and changeless.

Tradition can enrich our lives by helping us feel connected to times and peoples past. When we celebrate the Eucharist each week it is alive for today and a reminder of all that has gone before.

Belonging to God and understanding the appropriate role of tradition helps us evaluate and respond to authority. When authority is being used in ways that promote the love of God and of neighbor, it can be a good thing. When authority is being used to put down or belittle others, then we need to protest and work to reshape authority to its proper purpose.

God knows all the possibilities before us. God calls us to live up to our potential- to respond to God’s call on our lives- in ways that honor each other and glorify God.

God calls each of us to live into our best potential – the potential that God knows from before we were born. God calls us to lean upon God when we are the crippled one and trust that the love of God never leaves us and in fact enables us to stand up straight, even on a Sabbath day.

“Do not be afraid, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia; thanks be to God.