

## I Know You!

### 4th Sunday after Epiphany, year C - Jeremiah 1:4-10

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, February 2, 2013*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

During the Epiphany season here between Christmas and Lent, we are called to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the significance of God's *participation* with humanity. We are called to renew our commitment as members of the body of Christ to sharing the light of God's saving love with *all* people – around the world and, perhaps more to the point and more frighteningly, across the street. We are called individually and corporately to speak the word of God to a world hungry to hear. But this Epiphanytide, as we focus on our call to spread the light of the good news of Christ, we are often left with a sense of inadequacy, of a feeling of unpreparedness for the task to which God has called us. We find ourselves wondering if God really knows what he's doing assigning *us* as spokespersons for his cause. Maybe God isn't aware of all the facts. Maybe God isn't up to date on our situation. Maybe God just doesn't know us too well.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning, Jeremiah tells about how God called *him* to bring God's message to the people of God. For Jeremiah, the issue was his age. "Ah, Lord God!" he says, "Truly, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." Jeremiah wasn't one of the learned class of professional prophets that offered prophetic advice to the people of Judah for a fee. He was just a kid, a young man of sixteen or seventeen maybe. Not a boy, really, but certainly not a person likely to be taken very seriously.

But God had a plan for Jeremiah's life. "Before I formed you in the womb," he tells him, "I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." Jeremiah tells us that the Lord reached out and touched his mouth and declared, "I have put *my* words in your mouth." "To all to whom I send you," the Lord tells Jeremiah, "you *shall* go, and whatever I command you, you *shall* speak."

We gather here this morning as a community of people who have felt the hand of God touching our hearts, touching our minds, touching our lips. We gather here this morning as a community of people who have had the words of the almighty, everliving God placed into our hearts, into our minds, onto our lips. We gather here this morning as a community of people who have seen the power of the Word of the Lord in our *own* lives, and we have been consecrated, set apart, to the work of proclaiming the saving power of that Word to the entire world. The Lord says to us, as he said to Jeremiah, "To all to whom I send you, you *shall* go, and whatever I command you, you *shall* speak."

But Jeremiah wasn't the only one with an excuse, was he? In a dusty town on the banks of the Euphrates, a man still named Abram questioned, "But Lord, where is this place you are promising me?" And God told Abraham, "I know you. Go where I send you."

"But Lord, I have this speech problem, how can I lead the people?" And the Lord told Moses, "I know you. Just say what I tell you."

"But Lord, I'm just a fisherman. I work with my hands, definitely *not* with my mouth." "Peter, I know you. Say what I tell you."

"But Lord, I have this thorn in my flesh." "Paul, I know you. Go where I send you."

"But Lord," we say, "that was then and *this* is now. I'm just one person, and not really a significant one at that. I don't know enough about you to make any sense. I don't know where to start. And besides, no one's going to listen to *me*, anyway." "I know you," God says "Go where I send you. Say what I tell you." "But I have people who need me, Lord, obligations to meet here where I am." "I know you. Go where I send you." "But I don't speak well. My language is often coarse and when I get excited, it gets even worse. *Your* words would fit poorly in *my* mouth." "I know you. Say what I tell you."

"But Lord, you *do* know me. Forget all those excuses. You *know* who I really am. You *know* what's deep down. Even though I love you and am forever thankful for what you've done for me, you don't want

*me* to speak for you. You know the hidden things, the ugliness that other people never see. You know how weak I can be.

“You know the years and years of sins that I have done and left undone. You know the many things, the many other *gods* that I have put ahead of my relationship with you. You know the times I’ve withheld as my own what should have been given to another... or to you. You know the times that I’ve let the half-truth, or gossip, or the little white lie, or the not so white lie pass for the truth.

“You know the nasty little secrets that I even try to hide from *you*. You know the times that I’ve nursed shameful thoughts. You know the times I’ve wanted something that someone else had so badly that I was willing to sacrifice *anything* to get it. You know the times I’ve hated someone so much that murder wasn’t all that far away. And you know, Lord, that if it weren’t for your constant pleading and prodding, I would be even worse.

“You *know* me, Lord. I know that you love me. But you know me too well to *want* me. You know me too well to *need* me. You know me too well to *use* me.”

But in our anguish and in our self-doubt, God’s firm reply is always, “I *do* know you. I have *always* known you.” “Before I *formed* you I knew you.” “I knew you when you celebrated your accomplishments – and I knew you when you were in torment over your failings. I’ve known you when you thanked me – and I’ve known you when you cursed me. I have known you when you felt bathed in the light of my truth – and I have known you when the darkness of doubt has threatened to swallow you whole.

“Everything you tell me about yourself I already know – and I know much more that you’re not even honest with *yourself* about.” “I *know* you.” “I have known you from before there was a before, I have known you since I knit you together in your mother’s womb, I have known all your yesterdays. I already know all your tomorrows. I know you *now*.” “And for just that long,” says the Lord, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer, “for just... That... long, I have had a plan for you.” “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,” he says, “and before you were born I consecrated you. I *know* you. I *love* you. You are *mine*. Go where I send you, and say what I tell you.”

We live our lives with a mission for which we were each set apart before we were born, a mission to spread the message of God’s love to a world of people clamoring to hear that they are not alone, desperate to know that they are not adrift. We gather here this morning as a community of people with a *mission*: to witness to God’s love for us, a love that is so vast that he came to earth to share with us the light that has brightened all eternity. This morning as we are sent out from here, we go out to the many place to which God will send us with a mission to spread the good news that God is *not* distant, that God is *not* far off, that God is *not* a stranger. To a world hungry to hear it, we are sent to proclaim that God *knows* us, that God has *always* known us – individually, personally, intimately – and that he loves us *anyway*.

Thanks be to God. Amen.