

SCRIPTURE LESSON JEREMIAH 1:4-10, HEBREWS 12:18-29, LUKE 13:10-17

This time it is the call of Jeremiah that comes to us reminding how God calls us to serving God in Jesus Christ. Jeremiah had the job of guiding the people of Jerusalem through the run up to the conquering of Jerusalem and Judah and into exile in Babylon. He warned the people of the doom of the nation because of their unfaithfulness. The fulfilling of the prophecy and then into the restoration of the nation and the religion in a new and different form. During this time the people seemed to repent from worshiping the false gods and the Jewish religion began to move beyond the cult of the temple, into a religion that became a part of the people's daily lives. Like most prophets Jeremiah believed he was not capable of fulfilling God's demands on him but God reassures him and prepares him to carry out the work God is calling him to. The symbolic touching of his mouth means God is filling Jeremiah with the words and abilities and the Spirit he will need to carry out God's call.

The author of Hebrews reminds us that we are not called to something of this world that can be seen, felt or touched. That is what makes being a Christian so hard. We don't even have statues of images that we can point to say "that is what our God is like." Our author suggests that such symbols would be beyond our ability to touch without being destroyed. But still God is real and what God is calling us to is real. Perhaps not in the physical sense but in the sense that we are bound with others into an everlasting relationship of love and compassion that is for all of God's people. And we must in Faith follow God's call on our lives, just as Jeremiah did. God has promised us many things as reward for our faithfulness but also much suffering for our failure to follow God's way. Just like Jeremiah we are called to serve God and that service may be difficult. But the rewards and faithfulness of God are just as certain for all of us that choose to answer God's call with devotion and service.

In the Gospel lesson we see the example Jesus sets for us as both individual Christians and as the church of Jesus Christ, the institution. Our call is to follow the lead of God and God's will, not necessarily the rules and doctrine of the institution. The leader of the synagogue is right! The rules are clear. Unless it is a life threatening situation no act of healing should be done on the Sabbath. The woman had suffered for 18 years and Jesus could have just as easily said to her, "Take two pills and see me in the morning!" The laws that were believed to have come from God would have been obeyed. But Jesus said in fact the rules needed to be looked at differently. The law allowed for and in fact demanded that a person with livestock of seeing to the comfort and health of their animals even on the Sabbath. I remember my Amish neighbors going to the barn twice on Sunday to do the work of tending to their cattle and milking them, in order to see to their comfort and health. The same with their horses. Jesus is now applying that same principle to this woman. She has suffered for 18 years and it's about time she is made comfortable and relieved of her suffering even on the Sabbath.

For many today the rules and the traditions of the church or their particular tradition takes comes before being sure we are doing the will of God or that thing that serves God the best and the most faithful way. The argument is that the rules were made with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consider how the traditions and rules of many denominations differ. Either the Holy Spirit is very confused or we fail to understand it correctly and are left with the question of whose rules are correct. Most often this is because keeping the rules are easier to judge or measure than other things. In the story of the woman in the synagogue it is easier to measure that no act of healing occurs then was the woman's suffering really eased, accept that in her straightening up she is shown to be eased. In today's world we often choose to take the path of least resistance and use rules as places to avoid difficult decisions even if it limits the righteousness of the act.

But we aren't called to something we can see, feel or touch. We are called into living in a relationship that calls us to treat people with love, kindness and justice. Sometimes this means going beyond the rules of this world that are easily measured because we can read them, recite them or see them carved in stone. If you were that woman what would you want for yourself and would best show you God's love by being healed or being put off and suffering longer even if just a night? How many times in our modern world is easing the suffering of people put off for one reason or another with a vague promise of relief, when it is in our power to heal or correct an injustice now but we hide behind the rules of the world from easing suffering for people. Or worse we hide behind the expense of bringing justice to people? Sometimes we even hide behind the Name of Jesus to avoid difficult decisions or doing difficult things. If we were that woman how many of us would want to wait? How many of us when we are suffering are satisfied with having our relief put off because of Red Tape, or some other thing? We are called by God to care for all people in Christ's name. Let us follow the lead of Jesus!