

Jeremiah 18:1-11
September 4, 2016
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

Before I say anything about this passage from Jeremiah, I want you to listen to his words. I want you to listen not just with your ears; but also with what St. Benedict called “the ears of the heart.” When we hear with our ears alone we will try to figure out what Jeremiah is saying. This usually means that we will try to make sense of what his words mean *to us*. When this happens we will often have a reaction to the words. We will think, “I agree with that;” or we will say “I don’t agree with that;” or we will think, “What the heck does this have to do with me?” In this case we will wonder what time it is and how long before we can go home. Listening with our ears is a good thing. But it is of limited use to our meeting God in scripture and having a spiritual experience of listening to and for God’s word.

To do this we must listen with the ears of our hearts. Listening with the ears of our hearts begins with the experience of listening with our ears and experiencing what happens when the sound waves of the spoken word are received by the brain through the funny things that are located on each side of our heads. This means that we will have the experience I just described. What we hear will either confirm what we believe to be true; it will challenge what we believe to be true; or it will appear meaningless or unrelated to our experience of life.

It is critically important to our meeting God in the spoken word that we notice our reactions to what we hear. These reactions are clues to deeper thoughts and deeper experiences. They are doorways to deeper reflection. But to go further, beyond our initial thoughts and reactions we need help. We need to admit that no matter how much we think we know-- God knows more. Whatever we think the Bible says, because it is God’s word, we will never plumb the depths of the meaning of scripture. There will never be a point where we can say, once and

for all, “This is what the Bible says.” Since scripture is an expression of the heart and mind of God, we will never reach the end of meaning or capture the fullness of God’s intention. The best I can hope for is to catch whispers of what God through the Holy Spirit might be saying to me. But in order to explore that whisper I need the help of spiritual friends. I will call two of these friends, Open-ness and Curiosity.

Open-ness is the willing ness to lay aside all of my deeply cherished beliefs to hear what God desires me to hear. This does not mean that I reject everything I have believes and the values that guide my life. Rather, Open-ness invites me to relax my grip. Open-ness invites me to recognize that I am not my beliefs; I am not my opinions, my political philosophy, my understanding of Jesus. I am a human being created with the capacity of sensing the presence of God in my life. Open-ness helps me to recognize that sometimes even my deeply cherished beliefs can actually get in the way of hearing and responding to God.

The very close friend of Open-ness is Curiosity. Curiosity is that childlike dimension which lives in a state of wondering. Curiosity lives in the world of mystery and sees life as something to be explored rather than something to be “got right.” Curiosity is not afraid to ask a silly question. The one who is curious of heart and mind is so interested in learning that there is no embarrassment about getting it wrong. As every scientist knows, most of the valuable knowledge we have begins by making mistakes or recognizing that our assumptions were not reliable. People who are afraid of making mistakes don’t learn. Worse, they live in fear. What is true of science is just as true of growing in our understanding of the Bible.

There is more to be said about this; however I want you now to listen to and for God’s word as spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. As you listen I invite you to notice:

- What is your experience of hearing the words? What thoughts or feelings do they prompt in you?
- Invite Open-ness and Curiosity to help you to listen beyond your first reactions. What whispers might you hear with the ears of your heart? Are there deeper echoes or resonances?
- What if anything might God be suggesting to you to guide you in your life?

Let's listen to and for God's word.