



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

### Epiphany 4 (C) January 27, 2019

[RCL] Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

#### Jeremiah 1:4-10

The prophet receives a summons from the Lord, and his response is reminiscent of Moses' when Yahweh called him to deliver Israel. In both cases, God would not be dissuaded, and essentially says that God has their backs. When any of us move into a new job, a new ministry, a new marriage, a certain amount of trepidation is a normal human response. God's promise to all of us is the same: God knew us before we were formed, God knows all of our gifts as well as our "growing edges," and in a life of faith, we can trust God's abilities and capacities, even—and perhaps especially—when we cannot trust our own. If we are fully competent to do a task, we do not need to trust God, because we can trust in our own experience and knowledge. Human competence tends to yield human results, but when we must lean on God and trust God to help us accomplish something, supernatural results may emerge. God promised deliverance and that is a promise for us today.

- What would you do if you were absolutely certain that you could not fail, because God called you to it?
- How are you living in too small a world, with too small a vision for the Kingdom of God, because you are depending solely on your abilities?
- What might it look like to surrender your list of "But I'm too...(young, old, poor, sick, shy, busy, introverted)" to God?

#### Psalm 71:1-6

I have an hour commute, and most days I use that time for prayer. A few years ago, while driving to work before dawn, I hit a patch of black ice. Four-wheel drive provides no benefits when the road becomes like a sheet of glass, and no amount of counter-steering altered my trajectory into a guardrail. Before impact, I had time to wonder if it hurt to die, and I held up my daughters in prayer. Since I am writing this, I did not die. In fact, though the truck was a total loss, the only thing I broke was my coffee mug. Along with the Psalmist and Jeremiah, I was delivered and saved. I was sustained by God, as we all are, and have always been. This prayer is a reminder of God's constancy; the images of a castle and a stronghold communicate protection and safety. When my life seems to be careening out of control, it is helpful to recall that my hope is in the One who has been my strength from before I was born.

- Can you notice God's presence in the trajectory of your life?

- Are you aware of a time when you have needed God’s refuge and strength?

### **I Corinthians 13:1-13**

Children resemble their parents, not only in eye color and facial features but also in behavior. How many of us have said something to our children and heard our parent’s words coming out of our mouths? God is love, and as God’s children, so are we. Paul is exhorting the church at Corinth to behave as God’s children, and to live as love. Power, prestige, and possessions are all ephemeral, even when they are “spiritualized” as gifts that are esteemed in a faith community. Love, however, is eternal, and noticing what it sounds like when I replace “love” with my name in verses 4-7 is a helpful barometer for my life with others. This is an exercise to notice where I am looking more like my Creator, and where I still have opportunities for growth. Just as adults do not scold a toddler learning to walk when he falls down, this practice is a venue where self-compassion is vital. God is always celebrating our first steps. Let us do likewise.

- In what ways do you see love as eternal?
- Who do you know that most embodies the characteristics of love? Why?

### **Luke 4:21-30**

Jesus is in his hometown and has just read a passage from Isaiah in the synagogue. Initially, the response was positive, and the expectation of the crowd is that he will perform the same miracles in Nazareth that he did in Capernaum. Jesus, however, quashes their hopes that he will be “their” prophet, showing particular favoritism when he points out that no prophet is accepted in his home country. To add insult to injury, he brings up Elijah and Elisha, and instances where they served not Israel, but others. Furious, the crowd drives him out of town so they can hurl him off a cliff. This shows us that public opinion is fickle, which is as evident in our society today as it was in the first century. In this early story of his ministry, Jesus is depicted as coming for the marginalized and the outsiders, as paralleled with the Elijah and Elisha accounts, rather than for the insiders only. Does this in any way reflect how the church sees Jesus today?

- Have you ever thought you deserved special privileges (such as a prayer answered the way you desired) because you are a Christian?
- Who would be on the list of “outsiders” in your community?

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