

Things Will Be Made Known
©2007 Ray Bagnuolo

Jewish scholar Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel stated that the writings of Jeremiah are written as if Jeremiah not only heard as words what God called him to say, but personally felt in his body and emotions the experience of what he prophesized. Heschel points to the verse:

Are not all my words as fire, sayeth God, and a hammer that shatters rock

It was a clue as to how difficult the overwhelming, personality-shattering experience of being a vehicle for Divine revelation was.

In some ways, I agree with author and Bible scholar Walter Bruggeman who says in his Preface to the Revised Edition of The Prophetic Imagination, that we have

“...the luxury of social distance from the sharp wounds of social reality” in considering the ancient prophets.

True that! No matter what we do, it is impossible to replicate an understanding of the times in which the authors we study lived and the events they describe occurred. We do have the luxury of, literally, thousands of years between us and them...and uncertain texts to add to the cloud of uncertainty.

And, in those thousands of years, Bruggeman suggests in the same book that the church has lost its capacity to act, so mired we have become in the *ethos of consumerism*. He states further that until the church recovers its tradition of faith and permits that tradition to be the primal way of our enculturation – the church will have no power to act.

As much as I might agree with much of this thought, I always get a little nervous around the concept of church power and the church’s power to act.

The hypothesis of his book is this:

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternatives to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.

It appears that prophets and those who write about them, continue to be difficult to deal with. This process of dismantling, delegitimizing, and re-energizing toward a new consciousness that returns to the old primal church leaves too much out

there for the zealots, in my opinion. It's scary to me, but is this prophecy? Is it a scary, zealot-driven business?

Over the next few weeks we will be looking to Jeremiah, one of the most important prophets and the author Luke – with his precision and clarity – to see if there is some other message here besides wholesale revolutions of cultures and religions. We'll have talk back and the chance to try and get a grip on these messengers.

So, today, to start - a bit of a review of Jeremiah. Who was he, besides a “bull frog”?

We know he was called out of his home town of Anathoth a small village, two miles northeast of Jerusalem somewhere around 626 B.C., at about the age of 24. He was born into a priestly family, although not a priest himself.

He lived in a time of upheaval and carried his message during the reign of at least five kings, and at one time or another was under the domination of the Assyrians, Egyptians, and Chaldeans of the Babylonian Empire.

His life, in many ways, depicted the life of a prophet: at one moment disdressed, dismissed, jailed, and at others treated with kindness and respect by enemies and supporters alike.

By the time of Jeremiah's death in his 90's, Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple had all been destroyed. What then did he accomplish? Later in this series, we will look further into how his life-work had an impact in his times and the times to follow.

About his ministry:

By all accounts, there was something of a street actor in Jeremiah, often taking to demonstrations to bring attention to God's message.

One of his best known statements is the “Temple Sermon” he delivered at the same time as the coronation of Jehoakim. This scathing rebuke of the times and the king immediately led to his arrest on capital charges. While the priests and the king were against him, Jeremiah had the favor of the princes and the people – and he was ultimately freed.

Using Barry L. Bandstra's [Reading the Old Testament, An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible](#) as a source, let me read the following about that temple sermon:

According to Bandstra:

Jeremiah was one of the few prophetic voices challenging the orthodoxy of Zionist theology, which defined the "right" shape of worship to the religious and political establishment. In his temple address, he brought an opposing perspective to bear on the function of the temple and worship on Mount Zion. Jeremiah delivered these words in the temple courtyard.

² Hear the word of YHWH, all you people of Judah who enter these gates to worship YHWH. ³ Thus says YHWH of Hosts, the Elohim of Israel: Reform your ways and your activity, and then I will let you live in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in these deceptive words--This is the temple of YHWH, the temple of YHWH, the temple of YHWH. ⁵ But if you reform your ways and your activity, genuinely act justly with each other, ⁶ do not oppress the resident-alien, the orphan or the widow, shed innocent blood here, or go after other gods (which can only hurt you), ⁷ then I will let you live in this place, here in the land that I gave your parents in perpetuity a long time ago. ⁸ Right now you are putting your faith in misleading words (This is the temple of YHWH!) but to no avail. ⁹ Would you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, go after other gods you do not know ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this temple, the one called by my name, and say 'We are safe'--only to keep on doing these travesties?! ¹¹ Has this house, the one called by my name, become a den of thieves in your opinion? Right now it appears that way to me," says YHWH. ¹² "Then go now to my place that was once in Shiloh. That's where I first housed my name. See what I did to it as a result of the wickedness of my people Israel. ¹³ Now, because you have done these things," says YHWH (and though I spoke to you persistently you would not listen, when I called you, you would not answer) ¹⁴ "therefore I will do to the house now identified with me--the one in which you trust, the place I gave to you and to your ancestors--just what I did to Shiloh. ¹⁵ I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out your cousins, all the descendants of Ephraim." (7:1-15)

It is rather easy to see why Jeremiah was not welcomed with a warm hug and a handshake after that speech. He roundly condemned the Judean people for putting their faith in the temple. But why?

Two reasons. First, Jeremiah claimed that the people were immoral, and given their immorality, nothing could save them, not even their sacred temple. Second, it seems the people viewed the temple almost superstitiously. They thought that the temple conferred automatic security. Official Jerusalemite theology claimed that Yahweh lived in the temple, and as long as he was there nothing tragic could ever affect Judah. Historical precedent backed them up in this belief.

Jeremiah countered that genuine security can only come from their faith in Yahweh. They must commit themselves to him, and their faith had to be actualized in moral living and undivided loyalty to him. This is none other than the Mosaic prescription.

I guess he was a bull frog of a prophet, called by God to clean out the temple, much as Jesus would the money-changers some 600 years later.

So where do we go from Jeremiah? The transition – I think - as underscored by last week's reading of Hebrews, is the birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus and his present Spirit in our world.

It was on that cross that the intersection came into view and prophecy was at once complete and embodied in a new cosmic world and set of teachings.

For now, let me say that it would be too simple to suggest that we are trapped or still struggling between those world, those intersections of the cross – navigating the waves of practices of ancient retributions and the witness of the Good News. Whether or not some have caught up with the reality -- the transition has been made. The early texts continue to inform us in ways that demonstrate the faith of people of their times against formidable odds, but with the birth of Jesus we passed into a new place of wholeness and integration as given to us in Mark's words from Chapter 12: 28-31:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," Jesus answered, "is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."

So, as we begin this short series of sermons of Jeremiah and Luke, we enter upon the scene with God ordaining Jeremiah, if not against his wishes, then certainly against his ability to believe in himself. Still, God calls him with certainty, for it is God who has amazing things in mind for him, in the still unfolding life of the nation of Jerusalem. The same God who has amazing things in mind for us, some of which we have already realized.

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you to deliver you." God says to Jeremiah and to us.

In today's readings of Luke, we see the connection – the parallel to Jeremiah and his temple sermon. Jesus, too, calls out the rule-keepers, the limiters, those who

somewhere along the lines got the rules mixed up with becoming the rulers; mistaking beneficent control for compassion and deliberate punishment for spiritual growth.

But as Luke tells us in this morning's readings, Jesus challenges the controlling forms of worship: "Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham who was bound for eighteen long years be set free from bondage on the Sabbath day?"

What better day could there be for all of us, children of Abraham, for what is being made known to us today: that God is with us and will deliver us through whatever it is we must face or are called to accomplish in God's name?

So, on this Sabbath let us rejoice, and heal, and be healed – even if we are in sorrow, for we are in the company of all who have gone before us. We, like the woman of Luke's gospel, are no longer bound to anyone, except in the loyal and moral lives we seek to lead in the name of the one who calls us all – by whatever voice, prophetic or otherwise, we might know such an One.

More to come...