

Sermon for FPC Gardena – Sunday January 31, 2010
Jeremiah 1:4-10 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

I have a friend who is a spiritual director. This means that she works with people of the Christian faith helping them to discern the ways and places that God is at work in their lives. She is fond of asking her directees, “What do you know that you *know* that you know...about yourself...and about God?” Another of her thought-provoking questions is, “What guides you? What is the rudder that pulls you back to your center when you begin to veer off course?” Note that a short answer won’t suffice here—answering, “Jesus” or “God” or some other name or concept doesn’t describe broadly or deeply enough the depths of our knowings or the strength of our rudders.

These are questions which take some time and thought and prayer. In some ways, these are questions which can take a lifetime to answer. Jeremiah was a young boy when he was first confronted with such a need for soul-searching. For the word of God had come to him, calling him to serve as God’s prophet, speaking God’s words and doing God’s work. Jeremiah’s first response (not an uncommon one, either among biblical folk or among present day believers) was, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak.” Jeremiah said, “Because I am only a boy,” but you can fill in your own choice—woman, child, new believer, seeker, whatever fits you best.

It won't actually matter what your excuse is when God calls you, because God sees through all that, just as God did with Jeremiah. God reminded Jeremiah, and God may certainly remind us, that it was God who first thought of us, who formed and shaped us, who gifted us with specific skills and talents, and who consecrated us for our individual callings before we were even born.

What might Jeremiah have been able to say that he 'knew that he knew that he knew' about himself in relationship to God at the time of his call?

**--That he was created by God for a unique purpose in the world,
as a prophet to the nations;**

**--That he was not to minimize his abilities because of his youth, but to live
into the fullness of who God created and called him to be;**

--That he need not be afraid, for God would be with him to deliver him.

Does Jeremiah's knowledge resonate with our own experiences of faith? What do we have in common with him in terms of our relationships to God?

--Well, we, too, were created by God for unique purposes in the world;

**--We are not to minimize our abilities, but we are to live into the fullness of
who God created and calls us to be;**

**--And, we need to be afraid, for God has promised to be with us always,
even to the end of time.**

If we combine such knowledge with God’s call in our lives, we are going to find ourselves on a journey. Yours will be different from mine, just as mine is different from those of my parents, my children, my husband. As the scriptures tell us, “There are a variety of gifts, yet it is the same Spirit who gives them.” And so, as each of us makes our personal journey of faith, answering God’s call in our lives to some kind of witness or mission or service, we will have the opportunity to compliment each other’s work—building one another up and building upon our shared visions and goals so that God is uniquely glorified through each of us.

As people of faith, what are our answers to the questions, “What guides you? and “What is the rudder that keeps you on course?” It is our faith in God which guides us, which keeps us on course. Yet God is, by nature, a mystery—not completely describable, in most ways intangible. We cannot see, touch, or grasp the full being of God, so how can we possibly define this ‘rudder’, which both beckons and guides us on our journeys?

I was never very skilled at mathematics, but I notice an equation within scripture which I believe can help us to grow in our understanding of God.

In the gospel according to John, we read that “God is love.”

And in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, from which we read today, we receive a beautiful description of love. So, in exploring the meaning of love, perhaps we may discover a fuller knowledge of God. Paul's writing makes it evident that our lives are to be guided by faith and hope, but that even more importantly, we are to be guided—and defined—by love.

What does this passage from 1 Corinthians have to say about the nature of love?

Love is patient....

Love is kind....

Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude...

Love does not insist on its own way...

Love is not irritable or resentful.....

Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing....

Love rejoices in the truth.....

Love bears all things.....

Love believes all things....

Love hopes all things.....

Love endures all things.....

Love never ends.....

God, as we have said, is a mystery--indefinable. Love is similarly difficult to define. But God *is* love, and so Paul's letter is also describing God's nature... P. 4

And so, let us consider what Paul's letter to the Corinthians is teaching us about God...

God is patient....

God is kind....

God is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude...

God does not insist on God's own way...

God is not irritable or resentful.....

God does not rejoice in wrongdoing....

God rejoices in the truth.....

God bears all things.....

God believes all things....

God hopes all things.....

God endures all things.....

God never ends.....

Neither God nor love can be fully defined, only described.

To be understood at all, both God and love must be experienced.

Both God and love can serve as the rudders of our lives, guiding us along our journeys as we seek to live in faith and in hope.

Through God we can know love, and through love we know God.

Paul affirms the mysterious nature of our God and our faith when he writes, “For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

This brings us, full circle, back to God’s words to the young Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”

God knows us, fully, completely. God calls forth the good gifts in each of us so that we may live our lives with love at the center, guiding us along God’s path.

We cannot, in this life, know God fully, only through glimpses and metaphors and through events and experiences of God which, like shooting stars, grant us bursts of understanding and moments of awe which deepen our faith even as they enhance the sense of mystery.

But we truly can know that we know that we *know* through the words of scripture, and the presence of love in our lives, that God is present and faithful, patient and persistent, calling us, guiding us, and—above all—loving us along every step of our journeys of faith.

May we respond to God’s call in our lives with faith, with hope, and with the deep and endless love that comes from God. Amen.

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.