

Pastor Jon's Sermon from the January 29/30 Healing Worship  
Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10 and Luke 4:21-30

Today, we will focus on healing. This is something our worship team reminds me of when we have a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month.

I feel we need healing more than ever in our world. There are many forms of healing: Physical healing, mental/emotional healing, spiritual healing, relational healing, or community healing. What kind of healing are you longing for today?

In the two lessons we read in church today, we see how fragile humans and human relationships are.

In our first lesson, the prophet Jeremiah is called as a boy to be a prophet to God's people in Israel and Judah who have turned away from God to worship other gods. They rejected God's commandments and lost their center. God wants Jeremiah to warn them of their impending doom and return to God. Jeremiah doubts himself and his calling by saying, I am only a boy. But God says, do not be afraid, I will be with you and give you the words to say.

Can you relate to Jeremiah at times when we say things like "I am only... or I am just a?" We often have self-doubts about our gifts and abilities and callings? We talk ourselves out of following God's call, thinking someone else will step forward, or thinking I might get hurt in the process... send someone else. For example, Jeremiah was constantly being rejected and mocked for speaking God's word to people. It was tough work.

Then in our Gospel from Luke 4 we see the story of "The Rejection of Jesus in his hometown". Jesus, at the beginning of his public ministry, goes to his hometown of Nazareth to the local synagogue. He read from the scroll of Isaiah that said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus then said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Last week I called this Jesus' job description.

People were amazed at Jesus' words at first, but someone reminded everyone, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" It only takes one bad apple to spoil the whole bunch. After that they had their mind made up. They made a judgement about Jesus and left no room for this new identity as a prophet and ultimately God's Son.

In this text, Jesus knows what it is like to be an outsider in his home town. He knows rejection. We have a God who journeys with us in rejection.

Jesus responds, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown." Then Jesus teaches about God's prophets who ministered to foreigners and restored them to health and wholeness. A widow of Zaraphath, a Gentile, who was living in a severe drought was down to her last bit of oil and flour for her and her son. She was going to bake one last cake eat it, and die. But God sent the Jewish prophet Elijah to her and he asked her to share with him. She did and miraculously her oil and flour never gave out. Then Jesus spoke of the prophet Elisha, "There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." Naaman was foreign general with leprosy. He was told to wash in the Jordan River 7 times by Elisha and he was healed. Two examples of God welcoming foreigners.

After Jesus said this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage because Jesus is suggesting that foreigners seem to be more receptive to God's healing than they are. As a result they wanted to throw Jesus off a cliff. But he mysteriously passed through them.

Inclusion of all peoples is a sign of God's kingdom come. Caring for the poor, healing, release of the imprisoned, and forgiveness are all marks of God's kingdom. When foreigners are included by God, it expands our calling as well.

Perhaps you know this feeling of exclusion or rejection. Know that Jesus is standing with you in whatever it is you are going through. Our God desires healing in many forms for all of us.

And may our minds be expanded by these lessons to know that God welcomes all and calls all to carry out this mission of healing and restoration, especially for those who are hurting and excluded. And may we have ears to hear the prophets of all ages who call us to account.