

Three Chopt Presbyterian Church

January 30, 2010

Dear Friends,

Here are some reflections for you since we are unable to gather in worship together in person. The two scripture passages are Jeremiah 1:4-10 and I Corinthians 13.

Any reference to Jeremiah will inevitably start a song playing in my head. You know what I'm talking about – if you were around in 1971. Credence Clearwater Revival, that's right. We'll have to explain it to the unfortunate few who don't understand. But, I digress.

<sup>4</sup>Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, <sup>5</sup>“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.” <sup>6</sup>Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” <sup>7</sup>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, <sup>8</sup>Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.” <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.”

The news that the United States military ceased airlifting Haitians to the US for medical treatment hit me today like a ton of bricks. I became angry. So much money has been raised for relief, and yet people are dying! Aid is not reaching the people! As in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we are watching the disaster after the disaster unfold before our eyes. I read an article in the [Richmond Times Dispatch](#) today about Dr. Chris Lambert, a physician from the Richmond area, married to a Presbyterian (USA) pastor, who will soon return from a stint in Haiti providing care after the earthquake. He is based at the hospital in Leogane, which I have visited, a Presbyterian-Episcopal partnership established many years ago. He is seeing treatable conditions resulting in death, injuries that would not be life-threatening resulting in mortality because of the lack of resources. I am heartbroken. I am angry. It feels like there is little I can do. But, I am mistaken. There is in, fact, much that I can do, much that I am called to do.

My friends in Haiti are rising to the occasion, bringing words of hope, continuing with ministry in the most difficult of conditions. I am inspired by them to continue on with my call, to do the things that are within my power to do, to move forward with the knowledge that God is, indeed, with me, that God, indeed, is with us. Which brings me to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is called by God. It hits him like a ton of bricks. He doesn't like it. He resists. He protests. I'm too young! I don't have enough experience! I don't like to speak in front of people! I'm intimidated! God, in return, gives Jeremiah “the proverbial what for.” Who do you think you are talking to? I made

you! I created you! Stop complaining! You are going to do what I ask. You are going to say what I tell you to say. You have no business being afraid, because I am with you.

Then God touches Jeremiah's mouth in a symbolic gesture. This, I think, foreshadows the many, many symbolic gestures that Jeremiah will make use of in his ministry. Jeremiah brings us the symbolism of the potter and the clay, the plumb line, and much more. Some of his symbolism can't be translated into English, as it involves alliteration and words that sound alike, homonyms and homographs.

God sends Jeremiah into the world, to speak. He will speak words of judgment. He will speak words of grace. God uses several verbs – verbs of destruction as well as verbs of renewal. Pluck up, pull down, destroy and overthrow! Your words, Jeremiah, will be words that snatch, grab, annihilate, and turn upside down! But that is not all, Jeremiah. Your words will also build and plant. Your words will restore and renew. Your words will reconstruct and bring forth blooms. Wow! Jeremiah is called to bring words of comfort as well as words of confrontation. You might say he is called to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted!

Of note is the fact that Jeremiah is called to speak to the world, not just to the people of Israel. In this prophet and through his words God has a message for all people, signifying that God's love extends to all. It is Jeremiah who brings the notion of a "new covenant" that is not "written on tablets of stone" but "written on the heart" – which is a foreshadowing of the new covenant to which Jesus refers in the New Testament.

Jeremiah proceeds to serve God faithfully, if reluctantly, for forty years. These are difficult years for the people of Israel. He preaches just before and during the fall of Israel to the nation of Babylon. Jeremiah's years of ministry are forged in the midst of a deeply personal distress, recorded in the book that bears his name. He is often called the "weeping prophet." Jeremiah's pain reminds us that there is no call without conflict, no summons without struggle. Jeremiah is often greatly discouraged. He is virulently opposed by his detractors. His life is not easy and the record of his ministry testifies to this fact. His fears and reluctance are reminiscent of Moses' protestations in Exodus 3-4, Isaiah's profound sense of personal sin in Isaiah 6, and Jesus' rejection by his hometown of Nazareth in Luke 4:21.

What keeps Jeremiah going is the promise God makes of the divine presence. God promises to be with Jeremiah, through it all.

Hmmm... I notice what God does not promise. God does not promise that there will be no disasters. God does not promise that there will be no death or disease or tragedy. God does not promise that human efforts will be successful at alleviating suffering. God does not promise that we will never face illness or loss or grief. But, God does promise to be present with us. And God does call us to lift up the message of hope.

What are our own conflicts and struggles with God's call on our life? How is God calling us to move forward, in spite of the obstacles that are before us?

The book of Jeremiah gives me hope that God can use an insecure, afraid, and protesting prophet. The book of Jeremiah inspires me to do what I am called to do, and leave the rest to God.

What is God doing in our midst? Well..... may I share a few things about our congregation...

Did you know that we have raised over \$3300.00 in funds for relief in Haiti?

Did you know that at least a dozen people beyond our congregation have contributed to our efforts because of connections with members and publicity through the newspaper, television and internet?

Did you know that our prayer shawl ministry quietly mailed a pink shawl to PC(USA) missionary Sharyn Babe, who was airlifted from Haiti and his recovering from her injuries in Ft. Lauderdale?

Did you know that we recently started a Food Pantry at TCPC – and that last Tuesday was the first day of operation? Yeah, these diligent Mission and Service folks, and other volunteers, have quietly been getting this up and running.

Did you know that as a congregation we are going to host the CARITAS program to provide housing for homeless men during the week of March 6-13?

Did you know that your leaders are working to think outside the box as we seek to bring nurture young people and bring the gospel message to those who have no church home? And... we are finding it is not so easy to cut our way out of our boxes!!!

Yes, God is moving in our midst as a congregation, in many ongoing, ordinary ways, and in new ventures that challenge us.

As for me, the earthquake in Haiti has shaken me in ways similar to other personal losses I have experienced. In the midst of my own struggle, I am inspired by you and our other friends in ministry who move forward in hope, sustained by the knowledge of the promise of God's presence. Let us remember that God has known us from before our birth, that God has called us before we had comprehension, and that God sustains us now as we seek to serve. Amen.