

SERMON: January 30, 2022  
Irondequoit United Church of Christ  
“Passing Through the Rage”  
Pastor Marvin W. Krieger

Here we have two Biblical figures, Jeremiah and Jesus, essentially proclaiming that God’s Spirit is upon them and that they have been chosen. We find these testimonies by both Jeremiah and Jesus taking place at the beginning of their mission; or should I say at the beginning of God’s mission.

Our old testament reading today begins after the book’s prologue and description of Jeremiah’s upbringing. He declares that God has shared that his prophetic wisdom was bestowed upon him before he was even born. He is bold enough to share that he has been ordained to speak out FOR God and that in doing so there will be people who will be torn from their place of authority but in the end there will be a building up and a new planting.

WOW! Such words had to have been threatening to many who were listening to him, and yet comforting to others, especially those who lacked power and felt that they were downtrodden. How does one respond to such boldness? Is this the young man that we have witnessed growing up, the son of Hilkiah? How can he make such claims? Being a prophet is tough business!

Then we have Jesus, just returning home after being away for over a month, and now here he is, finally back home. But wait a minute! There have been rumors of things that he has done on his journey back, things that seem mystical, or perhaps magical. Last week we heard about his reading in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and people being pleased and amazed when he declares that the words of Isaiah were now fulfilled in his presence.

Did we hear him correctly, is he really saying that HE is a prophet or even the messiah? Isn’t this that carpenter’s son? Isn’t this the guy who just a few months ago was working alongside his father? Yes, he faithfully attended synagogue and seemed to understand the scriptures far beyond many of us but still; is he really saying what we think he is saying?

Then Jesus continues, almost reading their minds saying that prophets have never been accepted in their own hometowns and gives examples which seem to infuriate them even more. Is Jesus also upset, upset that these people who he loves are beginning to become angered by him?

And today, we as followers of Jesus the Christ, think: “how could this happen, how could people doubt what he was saying.”

Truthfully we are often guilty at getting upset with others when they do not either think the way we think or the way we think that they should think, because after all, we know them. We have a tendency to place people into boxes or molds that make us comfortable, but what happens when a wall of that box comes down or the mold is broken? Too often we become upset, angry, or our emotions may even allow rage to enter.

I remember a time when my oldest son was in college getting a degree in graphic design. A new graphic design studio had moved in across from my homeless shelter and I had become friends with the owner. I asked her if she would take on my son as an apprentice for the summer, to which she agreed. Being the fantastic father that I am, I told my son of these great plans to which he informed me that NO he was staying in Pittsburgh and volunteering to work for Green Peace, a campaigning organization that uses peaceful protesting and creative communication to expose global environmental problems and promote solutions that are essential to a green and peaceful future. My muscles began to tense and I asked, "And what exactly are you going to be doing?" "Going door to door and sharing our goals" – a response that I really did not want to hear. "Son, I spent this time setting this in place and it will help on your future resumé." I just wanted to shake some sense into him, lucky for him he wasn't there in front of me. Then he said, "Dad, you told me that we had to work for peace and justice in this world; and that is what I believe I am doing."

He was stepping outside the box I had created for him, he was breaking down a wall which I had created in my mind. Could I have been one of those people in the synagogue who began driving Jesus toward the cliff? My son was hitting me with my own words, as Jesus was reminding these people the century old words they had heard in the synagogue. I was upset! They too were upset!

When conflict happens both parties become enraged, muscles become tense, blood pressures rise, and walls of defense are set up on both sides. Rage is not healthy for either party in conflict and it takes at least one side to step out of that rage in order to find peace. We sometimes need to take a step back in order to move forward; often we have to turn to God to ask for such strength and believe that he will direct us to find a solution. How else could Jesus move through the angry crowd that day?

Many positive happenings in life come out of conflict situations which are then put into perspective by allowing God to intervene. God not only spoke to those in the Bible years ago but he continues to be present when we listen.

When I went before the Board of Ordained Elders in the United Methodist Church I was asked how I was "called"! And others have asked me that since. I shared with them that I was "called" out of an argument with my Dad. First you have to understand that the way in which my father and I shared our love for one another, it was through verbal jousting; onlookers would call it arguing but it was actually a way in which we

stimulated each other's thoughts on a variety of topics. I don't remember what the discussion was about but I do remember that we were in the kitchen and it became very heated. I wanted to put an end to it and so I thought: "How can I win this?!" Now at that time I was contemplating becoming an orthodontist, and Dad thought that would be great because I would be making a good living; the mold was created! So in my mind I thought, ok, I'll shock the pants off him. I began thinking of the low paying jobs, then my plan was to tell him that is what I am going to become. [First thought, a garbage collector (didn't make what they do today), second a minister. He wouldn't believe the first one but the second one he might since I had been going to youth group. This will do it!] Out of my mouth came: "You know Dad, I've decided that I'm not going to become an orthodontist and make lots of money; I'm going to be a minister!" Mission accomplished, I won the joust! He was stunned! The son as an orthodontist mold had been broken and I walked back to my room. Later I thought about that scene, why did I say minister when there are actually other professions making far less. What was moving me in this direction and why was I beginning to feel that this was MY path? My Dad must have realized that this was the journey I was meant to take because he became my greatest supporter, whether it was as a church pastor or as the Director of a homeless shelter, his encouragement never failed. God's Spirit sometimes moves us in unexpected ways. Yes, the bantering and jousting continued and so too did our special bond!

How else could Jesus have walked from the edge of that cliff through the crowd. He allowed God's Spirit to guide him through the existing rage.

There are times in which rage may come from external sources and other times when the rage comes from within. We need to face that rage and examine its source. Rage in any form can only be calmed by allowing God to guide us through it, we have to open ourselves up to his presence, even if it sometimes uncomfortable.

Look at the scene that is laid out before us in today's scriptures. Who are we? Are we members of the synagogue, or should I bring it closer to us by saying church, the crowd, or are we Jesus? Perhaps in our journey through life, we are both.

May God truly be our guide as we pass through the rage!