

## Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost | Jeremiah 1:4-10 | Rev. Barnabas Pusnur August 21, 2022 | Church of St. Paul & the Redeemer

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One fine day the Word of the Lord comes to prophet Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” Before I formed you, I knew you. To me this statement is not a display of God’s power of foreknowledge, rather it is a display of God’s intimacy with his creation. The Lord tells Jeremiah, before I brought you into existence, you were in my thoughts, you were in my heart. I knew you.

Does God know each of us like this? Were we in our creator’s heart and mind even before we came to be? When my daughter Khushi was a baby I used to hold her and keep making conversation with her. It gave me so much joy to see her and to be with her that I often used to ask her: Khushi where were you until now? Where did you come from? I think the answer is she was in the heart and mind of God. For isn’t that what creation means: to bring into existence that which is imagined in the heart & mind. There are passages in the New Testament which say we were chosen before the foundation of the world. And so, I believe we were all intimately known by God even before we came to be.

And it is not only our beginning, but even when we die the New Testament reminds us that we return to Christ’s eternal rest. The Book of Common Prayer in the liturgy of the burial of the dead says “if we have life, we are alive in the Lord, and if we die, we die in the Lord. So, then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s possession.” We are the Lord’s intimate possession. We belong to Christ. If only we could recognize our birth, life, and death as surrounded by the love of Christ, we would see our life so differently.

It was in this kind of intimacy that I believe God called Jeremiah for a special task. This task

involved him proclaiming God’s word to Israel, Judea and to the other nations. However, the word that was to be proclaimed was sadly harsh words of judgement. These words would cause people to be mad at Jeremiah and they would arrest him and persecute him and send him to exile. God gives him a heads-up about all this even while promising to be with him. He says, “They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you..., to deliver you.” Jeremiah was called to speak the truth when it was extremely unfavorable to speak so. He would be speaking truth to powerful kings and royal chiefs. A truth for which he would be persecuted. A truth which would sometimes be perceived as not abiding by the norms, not preserving the peace, and simply being disruptive. Yet, God thought it was an important truth. A truth that was to be told to the powers that be.

Between me and my wife, we have different estimations of how to balance truth and peace. I lean more heavily on the side of preserving peace, sometimes by keeping quiet about the truth. My wife, however, is different. When she is doing this truth telling, I often timidly keep thinking it was the act of truth telling that got Jesus killed.

But Jesus knew what he was doing. Jesus’ message was a message of love, but this message of love was not just some good feeling, fluffy, superficial message. It was a love that demanded action, that cut through hypocrisy, cut through practices that put tradition over people, and cut through deep rooted human selfishness. We were reminded in last Sunday’s sermon by Roger that interpreting the times often means being called by Jesus to take sides. It’s taking the side of truth and love that costed

Jesus and he paid the price through his own death on the cross.

However, the death of Jesus in a very mysterious way made possible the forgiveness of human sin and selfishness, it made possible the reconciliation between God and human beings, and reconciliation between fellow beings. A death in which the washing of sin takes place.

This morning we will witness a baptism and a significant part of baptism is in fact being baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. In the baptismal liturgy when we thank God for the baptismal water, the celebrant will say "We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death."

Today, Micah will be baptized and when he is being baptized, he in a mystical way will be baptized into the death of Jesus. A death that speaks truth to the powers that be, that calls people to reconcile to God and each other, that breaks the hard-hearted selfishness.

But that's just part of the meaning of baptism. Micah will be baptized not just into the death

but also into the glorious resurrection of Jesus. Jesus didn't simply die. He rose in power with a resurrection that is promised to all. Today's baptismal liturgy will say "Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory." We will thank God for the waters of baptism because by it we share in his resurrection. Micah will be baptized into the resurrection of Jesus. A resurrection that gives hope when there seems to be no hope. A resurrection that gives power when we feel powerless.

Baptism is an initiation rite, and Micah will be reborn into the community of believers. Just like Khushi and all of us, I am confident that Micah has been on God's heart and mind even before he was born. God in God's intimate love for him calls Micah to a loving relationship in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. And like Micah, through today's baptismal liturgy we are all called to experience the intimacy of our God and the call to serve one another in love and truth. Amen.