

Reflection

Jeremiah 1: 4-10

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

February 2nd, 2025

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Title: Trust a known God

Prayer: Holy One you are far greater than we can imagine. Help us keep it that way.
Amen.

“Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

Amen.

That’s kind of all we need to know. Paul wraps it up with a bow and sends us on our way.

Here we are, in these earthly bodies, talking a lot, banging our gongs, and clanging our cymbals like we know everything – when we only know one small part.

Or, maybe we are here in these earthly bodies acting like Jeremiah and refusing to believe that God can use us for anything – “Oh, no, God, truly I don’t know how to speak.”

We are just one part. We only know one part. God – the Creator – is the know-it-all.
And, this is good news.

We would explode or self combust if we had the pressure of knowing everything.

Thank goodness God can hold the whole of it all ... And we only have to do and know our one part.

Paul makes this clear in the Corinthians passage.

Love – God – the Love of God – needs to be the core of everything. None of our actions are worth a dime if they are not executed from the belly of Love.

I really appreciate this description of the kind of love Paul is talking about here:

It's not a love of swollen feelings that may come and go. It's not the love of flowery or eloquent words. This is God's love—from the Greek *agape*—often described as

"unconditional love" by Christians. [And, here's what's so great:] It is unconditional in the sense that it does not depend on the one being loved, but on the commitment of the one acting. (bibleref.com)

The response doesn't matter. It's the love offered that matters.

When we listen to someone in distress, when we sit down to talk something through, when we offer a helping hand or a kind word, when we talk about how our faith changes our lives, when we stand up for someone who is being mocked or shamed or bullied; we're not doing this to get something back, to be seen or even to feel good about ourselves. We're doing this because it's what we're called to do. It's the outpouring of God's love through us. It's us letting ourselves be used by God.

This kind of love is unconditional: it does not depend on the one being loved, but on the commitment of the one acting. God acting through us. God claiming us as her own.

The city of Corinth was not an easy place for Paul to plant a church. It was a major trade centre with two ports. It was the heart of Roman imperial culture in Greece. It had everything a major city would have – commerce, crime, prominence, an underbelly, temples, theatres, law, corruption, healthy people and hurting people.

Paul was writing to an arguing congregation – there were power struggles, disputes over spiritual gifts and some distorted notions of spirituality. Paul wanted this community in conflict to understand that they needed to start – and stay – with their relationships. Their pretentious religiosity didn't mean anything if they didn't start by building a bond of love with each other and then growing that outward.

Everything is hollow without that. And building that bond is probably the hardest thing to do ... which is why when we think it's all on our shoulders we spend a lot of time on fancy words, gongs and cymbals.

But, it's not all on our shoulders. We only know in part; yet God knows us fully. God acts through us. God claims us as their own.

Which is what happens for Jeremiah. There is a deeply intimate connection between God and Jeremiah. God says I 'formed' you, 'knew' you, 'blessed' you, 'appointed' you. That is a love connection.

God wanted Jeremiah to know this because he then asked Jeremiah to 'pluck up,' 'pull down,' 'destroy,' 'overthrow,' 'build,' and 'plant' the nations. Basically, dismantle and reconstruct everything.

God calls us to this kind of lifelong commitment too. Even when we shy away from the task. Our whole life is God's, not just our Sunday morning. We can let go and let God claim us. We can shape our lives every day in such a way that God's love is at the core of every thought and action we have.

The quotation at the top of the bulletin says "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

It's attributed to Corrie ten Boom. How many have heard of her?

Corrie was born Cornelia Arnolda Johanna ten Boom, in Haarlem, Netherlands in 1892. She was one of four kids, the daughter of a watchmaker and the first female in Holland to be granted a watchmaker's licence. She wrote a lot of books; one of which is an autobiographical book called "The Hiding Place." In 1975 it was made into a movie, and then a stage play, and then a movie of the stage play.

Corrie and her family were devout Christians. More precisely they were Calvinists in the Dutch Reformed Church. They read the bible regularly and prayed. They also believed in the service to society, and offering shelter and food and money to anyone in need. Their tradition also believed in the equality of all human beings before God.

Which is why by the time the Nazis were coming through their town, the ten Boom family knew they had to help their Jewish brothers and sisters. During the war they were a safe house that had a false wall built onto one of the bedrooms to hide Jews and resistance workers whenever there was a raid. Fugitives would stay with them for a few hours up to several days before being moved to another safe house.

Unfortunately, they were found out at the end of February, 1944. Before the Nazis entered their house, the folks in hiding managed to get behind the wall; but Corrie and her family were taken prisoner. She and her sister, Betsie, ended up at the Ravensbruck concentration camp. Betsie died in the camp and Corrie was released – through a clerical error – in December of 1944.

Corrie, her family and the network of safe houses managed to save an estimated 800 Jews.

After her release Corrie visited over 60 countries before dying at the age of 91. She spoke openly about her love for Jesus and all that Jesus does for us, she spoke of God's love and God's constant presence in our lives.

She said things like:

- There were circumstances that you can't do anything about, and it was only the Lord carried me through.
- There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still.
- Real power lies in forgiveness not vengeance
- Jesus' light is stronger than the deepest darkness.

She was a watchmaker and yet, like Jeremiah, said yes to God instead of listing all the reasons her family shouldn't hide people.

She was imprisoned and lived through a concentration camp and yet, like Paul, spoke openly about the power of life when God's love is at the centre.

On paper she may not have looked equipped to handle all this danger.

But, that's the thing – we only know in part.

The God Corrie knew was a God of love that would equip her with what she needed in each and every second of her life.

To let ourselves be known and claimed and called by God is to get out of God's way so God can be at work in and with us. If we focus on the love Paul talks about then we remember that God is committed to us; wants to be at work in us.

Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God, Corrie says.

We may not free 800 prisoners. But maybe we will.

We may not tear down and build up nations. But maybe we will.

This is not for us to decide.

We can plan how our lives will go all we want, but perhaps a more efficient use of our time is to trust our unknown future to a known God.

Amen.