

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 13:10-17  
Proper 16, Year C

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TO PLUCK UP AND TO PULL DOWN:  
Being a For Prophet Church

Have you ever been in the situation when you think you're saying something or doing something good, and then ..."wham"...someone aggressively criticising you? ??

I know I have, and it's not a pleasant surprise when that happens.  
And, usually a polite defence is brushed aside.

It's uncomfortable, even painful, so we generally learn to screen our words or bite our tongues when we are around such a person, and just smile and talk about the weather.

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It sure seems people are really polarized these days. Some are very touchy about certain issues. Opinions and loyalties can be quite entrenched. Informative discussions, without emotional intensity, with someone with a different position are rare.

Thus, people tend to stick with their own homogeneous group--where all agree on the big issues..... or.... we avoid certain topics in order to keep things calm and unemotional.

Yet, how do engage? How do we test our views?  
How do we learn from the "other side"?  
And, what about challenging those who are either ignorant or possess selfish and destructive ideology?

Is perceived harmony-- a calm, cordial interaction the prime virtue?  
Should we all get along, whether we like it or NOT?

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Jesus was Not afraid to rock the boat. He wasn't motivated to get along with everybody. I don't think he was easily intimidated, either.

Occasionally, Jesus said or did things to provoke his adversaries.  
He was a bit of a gadfly, but not insolent.  
Certain situations may necessitate provocation.  
Such as:  
If hornets build a nest in your house, it's best to move the nest and endure a brief attack, than to learn to live subjugated in fear.  
This is especially true if your responsible for children in the house.

The episode in Luke begins with Jesus teaching on the Sabbath in a synagogue.  
At this stage of his ministry, he wasn't doing that anymore,.... because the leaders would no longer welcome him to speak there.  
So, by being there, Jesus is pushing their buttons, a bit.

Nevertheless, Jesus was merely teaching when he couldn't help but notice a cripple woman enter. She was all bent over, and had been that way for a generation.

The passage states that a spirit from Satan caused her condition.

Demons do have a way of twisting us up and casting our vision down.

Still, citing Satan is a poetic way of saying that such ailments and suffering are NOT from God. God moves to bring healing and wholeness to those who are suffering, broken and weak. God is Not the source of such suffering.

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Jesus took the imitative to talk to her, to touch her and to heal her from her affliction. And, upon receiving Jesus' touch she stood up straight and praised God.

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To the establishment / to the religious leaders, Jesus' supernatural demonstration only served to raise Jesus' status up and bring theirs down. He was a perceived threat to their power and influence.

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So, the leader of the synagogue, with his colleagues behind him, stood up and verbally assaulted Jesus with condemnation for healing the woman on the Sabbath.

The leader did NOT politely question Jesus on his motives. He did not calmly comment on the unorthodox discretion. Moreover, the leader didn't even address Jesus. He ignored Jesus as he passed judgment on him. He was ranting to the crowd--trying to win them over.

Imagine Jesus' surprise.      Imagine how the woman felt for being the centre of such a ruckus.

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Of course, Jesus couldn't just walk away in the shadows in silence. However, he could have been a good Mennonite and said, "Excuse me, there is contention. Let's form a committee to look into this. Perhaps, we could have a discernment process..... or simply 'Agree to disagree.' We need not upset anyone."

Instead, Jesus lashed out at all his adversaries. "You hypocrites" is plural.

Jesus exposed their flawed reasoning / their unjust laws and mean nature.

The Sabbath rules allowed them to care for their animals / their personal property,..... but forbid helping the weak and suffering.

They not only verbally attacked Jesus, but they also were unrighteous and unjust with "their" pious protection of the Sabbath. Their rules were unjust to the crippled woman, ..... and.... they were trying to persuade the crowd to join them in their perverse theology.

Jesus wasn't concerned about converting them to his way or establishing a calm rapport. Jesus intended to lay them low and to negate their poison, even if it meant shaming them and pushing them farther to their pole / away from God.      Shocking?

No. They owned their our response. Maybe in time they'd see the light. ????

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This text contains a side lesson about what it means to keep the Sabbath--that it's not about legalism.

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*When I was a teenager, I remember coming home, one Sunday afternoon, with something I had just purchased.*

*My father criticised me for shopping on Sunday, noting it was disrespectful.*

*He explained that shopping is spending money and forcing others to work on Sunday.*

*As you know, the youngest in the family assumes they have a right to always speak freely, even bluntly.*

*I retorted, "What about you and mom going to a restaurant today?"*

*My father had that one worked out. He replied, "Well, people do have to eat on Sunday, which requires a degree of work for someone."*

*It was a weak rationalization, but being my father, I let him have that one.*

*But then I countered, "What about electricity, water and gas? You still use those on Sunday, and have you arranged for Sundays to be eliminated from your monthly bills?"*

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Legalism / obedience by following the rules.....works to make us feel pious and faithful..... if we want it to, but ....it really is false / unjust if it doesn't work fairly for everyone.

Nevertheless, proper Sabbath observance was a minor aspect of this text.

The message is much more about standing up and speaking out for justice and righteousness,.....even if it increases polarization and pushes some away.

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The Jeremiah passage presents Jeremiah's call to be a prophet.

Jeremiah was afraid to be a prophet; he was afraid to speak out.

But, he felt God's touch upon his life, and heeded God's calling to proclaim messages that build up and plant seeds, and that destroy and overthrow.

The prophet lifts up and pulls down.

Jesus was part prophet. In this one engagement, Jesus lifted up a hurting woman and pulled down his adversaries.

The church is the body of Christ. We of many parts form one body--Christ in the world.

Yet,..... I think, too often, we are missing a part. We are incomplete.

In our pursuit to get along and to be quiet and non-threatening,..... we have silenced the roll of prophet.

Yes, we live in a polarized world, but it was polarized 2,000 years ago, and that didn't dissuade Jesus.

Our purpose is not keep the calm and live in a make-believe harmony.

Do we really want to live with hornets, and what about the weak and the children.  
Who will stand up for them?

Silence would have empowered the synagogue leader.  
Silence in the face of injustice, lies and abuse.....empowers the bullies and the tyrants, and silence invites more injustice, lies and abuse.

This is true in one to one relationships.  
It's true on the schoolyard..... or at work, and it's true at the national and international level.

Nobody should become a victim when assaulted.  
As Jesus did, we need to defend ourselves and our beliefs,... and more importantly, we Must defend the weak and suffering.  
And, violence is never a good defence, and the same with silence.

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This past week, in the US, Private Bradley Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison for releasing classified information.  
What he gave to Wikileaks contained NO security risk to the US.

The material did expose countless illegal and unjust activities committed by the US, such as abuses to Iraqi prisoners and brutal slaughter of innocent civilians. Some of the material was in video form. I tried to watch one slaughter committed in 2007. The wee bit I saw still haunts me.

Bradley Manning took a stand against injustice, yet nearly all Americans are silent in his defence.  
He broke the law, after all,.....just as Jesus did.

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I've learned that it is fairly safe to talk about the United States and that I better be careful about addressing our own national issues.  
And, I confess the pressure has mostly been affective.

Yet, the legalistic *foul* call of "partisan politics" can serve to muzzle in the face of injustices.

It doesn't matter who's in power. Standing up for justice and compassion is above the banality of party loyalty.

For example, it is plain and simply wrong how we are treating criminals and prisoners.

Crime rates were dropping, so "tough on crime" is irrational.  
Moreover, the policy is making people who made bad choices into bad people. And, bad people should be punished, they should be abused,..... and the good police men and women--the good guys are thus prone to shoot bad guys,..... because their bad.  
The powerful are preying on the weak.

No one should be abused, and if one deserves to be killed, then we all do.

Another gross injustice, in our country, is how information and scholarly research is being stymied and controlled.

We need to search for the truth. We need full exposure.

We need to be able to adequately question all things.

If we can't, ..... then well..... we'll live in a lie..... and God have mercy on us,..... because the weak and powerless will suffer first and more.

I know..... this is negative stuff, and so is much of the Luke text. And, if we only seek to build up, then.....we're silencing part of Christ--the characteristic of a prophet.

We are good at helping people. We are faithful in service / in lifting up the weak and suffering,..... as we must be.

Yet, it is bizarre to think that we can pick and chose what parts of Christ we want to be..... and ignore the rest,..... then claim that we are a church.

If we merely go around helping people and having great potluck, then we are basically a noble not-for-profit organization.

Because,..... **we are NOT for prophet..... spelled p r o p h e t.**

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God called out Jeremiah to be a prophet, and we are called to be a church -- the body of Christ in the world today.

Therefore, some of the parts will excel at healing,..... others at teaching..... some at fixing things and plucking up..... and some will be as prophets.

We need all parts!!!

And,..... please don't look at me.

I'd rather preach warm fuzzy sermons. I do not want the part of lone prophet.

These days,..... in our day and age,..... we need many voices speaking out.

So,..... who will speak out for the weak?

Who will defend the poor?

Who will expose lies and injustices?

Who will stand up when so many are silent?

Who will risk something big.....for something good,.....in the name of Jesus Christ.

Or..... should we all go home,..... and learn to live with wasps.