

EPIPHANY 4- 2033
Jeremiah 1:4-5;17-19
1Cor 12:31-13:13
Luke 4:21-30

How often have you heard, “Why will nobody listen to me?” Why indeed? Why do people refuse to listen? We all switch on our selective hearing button at some point, but listening to what is said is one thing, hearing the message and responding are another.

Jeremiah didn't want to hear God's call to be a prophet. When God called Jeremiah, he played the avoidance game, providing every excuse why he could not accept God's plan. God answered all Jeremiah's excuses and promised him that he would protect him. And when he did become a prophet, the people did not listen to him.

Jesus was also commissioned by God to proclaim the closeness of the Kingdom of Heaven. While he healed the sick, people rushed to him and no doubt many listened what else he said but they didn't hear the message. When people receive what they want they go away happy, they don't often look beyond their good fortune to a deeper meaning. They did not recognise the healings as a sign of the age of the Messiah that Isaiah prophesied. The healings restored people's bodies and minds, but not their souls.

Jesus changed his focus in Nazareth where he read the Scriptures in the synagogue. At first the congregation were delighted with Jesus. I am sure that some of them thought that if he made Nazareth his base instead of Capernaum, the local hospitality industry would boom. It is no wonder they turned nasty when Jesus reminded them that, like Elijah and Elisha, he must go elsewhere because God's prophets have usually been rejected by God's people but not always by the Gentiles. Jesus did not go to other places because he was rejected by his own people in Nazareth. He was rejected because he said that it was God's will that he went elsewhere, including to the Samaritans and Gentiles.

Why do people not listen? God is Love. That is his nature, so perhaps deafness to God is due to a misunderstanding of love. Love is not simply an emotion. Love is praying and working for the good of the one who is loved, and the ultimate good for a person is his or her salvation. Love is not magical. It will not remove a child's cuts and bruises, but a loving cuddle restores balance. Love doesn't prevent suffering in ourselves or others but it enables us and others to find the positive in the suffering. It was C S Lewis who said that if we want to avoid suffering in this life, love no one or no thing, because the moment we love we open the door to suffering. We will suffer because of the one we love, together with the one we love and on behalf of the one we love.

St Paul spells out the nature of love and how outwardly focussed it is. The amazing thing about love, which is a central human need and desire, is that we cannot make another human love us. We can make people obey us by imposing sanctions but love is a gift that must be freely offered and freely received.

God offers us his love but we have to choose to receive it. He doesn't manipulate or bribe us into loving him even though at times we might think he does. Faith is our loving response to God's love for us. It is not a response of fear. Love is a two-way process and while God invites us to accept and respond to his love at our baptism, we must continue with our response. If we do so, our love for him will deepen in a similar way to that of true human love.

Many people did not listen to the prophets, Jesus or his apostles. Many people not only don't listen to the Church today, some want to destroy it. We must not despair because despair comes when we think we, rather than God is in charge. We must stand firm, go on living and teaching the good news of Jesus and his resurrection. That's how it was for Jeremiah, Jesus and St Paul. It has been the same for the Church ever since the Church. So let's get on and do it.

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