

“To Whom Shall we Listen?”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

June 28, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – June 28, 2020

Be Still and Know - #64 in the Book of Praise - All verses

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am God

I am the Lord that healeth thee

I am the Lord that healeth thee

I am the Lord that healeth thee

In Thee O Lord I put my trust

In Thee O Lord I put my trust

In Thee O Lord I put my trust

Lee Herrington | Tom Fettke © Words: 1992 Curb Word Music (Admin. by WC Music Corp.) Music: 1986 Curb Word Music (Admin. by WC Music Corp.) CCLI License # 1952948

When Israel was in Egypt's Land - #708 in the Book of Praise – Vv. 1&2, 4&5

When Israel was in Egypt's land, let my people go!

Oppressed so hard they could not stand, let my people go!

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land

Tell old Pharaoh: let my people go!

The Lord told Moses what to do: let my people go!

To lead the Hebrew people through, let my people go!

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land

Tell old Pharaoh: let my people go!

When they had reached the other shore, let my people go!

They let the song of triumph soar, let my people go!

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land

Tell old Pharaoh: let my people go!

Lord help us all from bondage flee, let my people go!

And let us all in Christ be free, let my people go!

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land

Tell old Pharaoh: let my people go!

Words & Music: public domain

To Show by Touch and Word - #763 in the Book of Praise – All verses

(words adapted to be consistent with the Book of Praise)

To show by touch and word devotion to the earth
To hold in full regard all life that comes to birth
We need, O God, the will to find
the good you had of old in mind

Renew our minds to choose the things that matter most
Our hearts to long for truth till pride-of-self
For every challenge that we face,
We need Your guidance and Your grace

Let love from day to day be yardstick, rule and norm
And let our lives portray your word in human form
Now come with us that we may have
Your wits about us where we live

Fred Kaan / Ron Klusmeier © Words: 1975 Hope Publishing Company Music: 1974 Ron Klusmeier (Admin. by Hope Publishing Company) CCLI License # 1952948

Scripture Texts: Jeremiah 28:2-9 (NIV)

² “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³ Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord’s house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. ⁴ I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.’”

⁵ Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord. ⁶ He said, “Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord’s house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. ⁷ Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: ⁸ From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹ But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true.”

Matthew 10:40-42 New International Version

⁴⁰ “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

False prophets. They are often difficult to recognize. They can be pretty convincing, drawing people in with promises of a better future, a better life. They claim to have special knowledge and sometimes will even frighten people into listening to what they have to say with the prediction of dire consequences if they ignore them. False prophets can give people false hope, which is devastating, or false fear, which can be debilitating.

One problem in identifying a false prophet is that sometimes the person actually believes they are sharing the truth. They are so convinced of it they cannot help but want to share it. I remember a TV drama in which a commune had been founded by two men as a con to get people to pay ridiculous fees for courses that would make them better people and therefore make their lives more enjoyable and richer. The courses were fake, but people were drawn to them because of the promises that were made. Several years into the scheme, one of the men wanted to sell up and run with the money, but the other had actually come to believe in what they were doing. He was actually trying to make people's lives better! At the very least the commune provided a place of refuge for broken people. On the surface, it sounded like a pretty believable thing. In the end, it was shown to be false. It wasn't what it appeared to be, and people were rather disappointed in finding out the truth they believed was actually a lie.

In the reading from Jeremiah today, we see two prophets sharing a word from the Lord, but they aren't saying the same thing. It must have been difficult for the people, wondering who to believe. One said things that were filled with action and hope. The other seemed to be saying it was time to settle in and accept their circumstances. One scholar wrote this about the scene playing out between Hananiah and Jeremiah:

“One prophet, Jeremiah, tells the people the truth. The other prophet, Hananiah, tells the people what they want to hear. One appears to us as the brave preacher who endures scorn for speaking the word the Lord gave him. The other appears to us as the soothing charlatan over whom everybody fawns because he offers near-term hope.

We cannot know what went on in Hananiah's head. Did he honestly believe that he preached a word from God? Did he succumb to the temptation to preach the popular word?”¹

There were people who listened to Jeremiah. There were people who listened to Hananiah. They didn't know what to do. Hananiah's message sounded so energetic and hope-filled. The sense of loss would be short-lived and then God would restore their life to what was before. Resisting the Babylonians was the way to go and they would be rewarded. Jeremiah's message sounded like they should resign themselves to the defeat and start making plans to live in that situation because their exile from their land would be lengthy. In the next chapter he tells them to build houses and plant crops because they are going to be there for a while. Jeremiah believed God would act, but not as soon as his counterpart was predicting. He was warning the

¹ Workingpreacher.org – Commentary on Jeremiah 28:5-9 by Charles L. Aaron Jr. Associate Professor of Supervised Ministry, Perkins School of Theology, Dallas TX. Posted as a resource for June 28, 2020.

people that they could not direct the outcome of the Babylonians taking over. They were going to have to make the best of their situation and wait with patience for God to act.

We know which of these men was the false prophet – Hananiah. Every preacher has softened a tough message at one time or another because it feels too harsh. I'd much rather preach a sermon that encourages and enriches one's faith than one that challenges and disrupts one's life. However, God does both. The true prophets did too, because they spoke God's Word, not their own. Jeremiah knew the truth and spoke it. Hananiah may very well have thought he was giving the right message, but in the end it would be Jeremiah's words that proved to be the truth.

The scholar whose work I was reading goes on to make some rather good points for us to think about. He writes:

“The contemporary reader can see the appeal of [Hananiah's] message. Doesn't trust in God mean that God will take our side? Won't God fight for us against our enemies?... Hananiah gives the people a plan and inspires them to resist the encroachment of the Babylonians. His message sounds strong and energizing.

Jeremiah believed that God would act again, but not soon. He taught the people to make the best of a bad situation, but not to try to get out of it. That message does not get the blood pumping. That message sounds passive and even weak. It sounds like co-dependency. We now know, of course, that Jeremiah, not Hananiah, spoke the word that came from the Lord.”²

It was hard for the people to know who to believe. Hananiah and his prep squad boost to their morale? Or Jeremiah and his ‘Rev. Doom and Gloom’ message? Put that way, we can see why one was more desirable than the other! Who would you choose to listen to?

The problem is that there is a time for both messages. Sometimes resistance and action is exactly what God wants. Sometimes, doing nothing and waiting on God is what we are to do. How do we know the difference? Certainly we pray about it and seek God's direction. We must pray for discernment when the way isn't clear. And, we can look to the wisdom of credible leaders and guides who will help us find the way forward.

In these days of pandemic, we are also experiencing a surge of voices and actions as the world meets the challenge of systemic racism head on. Standing back and allowing the repeated injustice that has been inflicted on the Black community has not been the way to go. As we are being made more and more aware of how this systemic racism has been all through our culture, throughout the generations, we are also being made aware of how the injustice has been made worse by a lack of action on the part of too many, by a lack of attention to what has been happening to people just because of the colour of their skin. Historical prejudice and mistreatment of Black people has simply been accepted as a part of history, but not recognized as the long-lasting wrong that still exists today. This is a time to listen to voices that tell us to act, and to work for change, to resist those who want to smooth things over with platitudes rather than actually make changes to the systems that are rife with racism, even when it is not

² Ibid.

recognized as such. It is also a time to genuinely listen while Black voices speak, telling stories, sharing pain, crying for justice.

On the Presbyterian Church in Canada website, the following is posted on the worship resource page:

“On April 16, 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote an open letter from the Birmingham jail, where he was imprisoned after participating in non-violent demonstrations against segregation. It is largely known today as the **Letter from Birmingham Jail**. The letter was his response to a public statement of caution outlined in *A Call for Unity* that had been issued by seven white Christian ministers and one Jewish rabbi, who agreed that there were injustices, but argued that the battle against segregation should be fought patiently and in the courts, not the streets.

In the letter, King cites Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Buber and Paul Tillich. King writes that, *‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.’*³

Racism is not someone else’s problem. We share it. In Canada there are also the voices of Indigenous peoples that cry for justice, that work to raise awareness and that seek healing from generations of mistreatment. The legacy of Residential Schools has scarred an entire people, an entire nation. Reserve lands are plagued with poor water and housing, lack of mental and physical health care, and despair. The legal system is terribly unbalanced with the number of indigenous as opposed to non-indigenous people that are in prison. Why is this? How do we change it? We listen, we care, we act. We are not called to act in violence or irrational ways, but in ways that will effect meaningful change between people regardless of colour or culture. We heed the voices that speak truth, and pray for discernment to know which words are false.

It isn’t always easy to know who speaks truth and who gives a false message. God knows, and we must trust the Lord to show us where to turn our ears and eyes. Jesus’ words about receiving his people with compassion and hospitality still ring true. *If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.* There is no colour of skin, economic status or cultural heritage associated with that statement.

I came across a prayer for hospitality this week. In part it reads: “God of Wisdom, God of Love we celebrate your faithful presence in our lives... Though we often turn away from you, you are ever concerned with our well-being... Teach us, Lord, to live our lives in the wholeness of your eternal values. We need your guidance and grace to be able to live in harmony with one another, show hospitality to the strangers among us, and to minister to the needy. By your spirit enable us to live a life in purity of thought and action, in humility of heart and generosity of giving. Help us never to forget that it was your unmerited grace that lifted us from

³ Presbyterian.ca/worship/

a lowly and sinful state... Enable us to follow in Jesus' footsteps and embrace those the world considers last, least, and lost..."⁴

With the words of that prayer in mind, let pray that those for whom we show acceptance and justice will speak words we need to hear, and that we will know how to respond. Sometimes the most profound words come from the most humble of voices. Pray that God will show us whose voices we should listen to, how to hear their truth, and how to respond. Sometimes we respond simply by listening because that is what is most needed – to be heard. Sometimes we respond by working to bring justice where there has been injustice, and lasting change where things have been wrong for far too long. Jeremiah was the true prophet because he spoke the words that needed to be spoken, which weren't words the people wanted to hear. Let us be open to hearing what is hard to hear, and doing what is hard to do, for God speaks the truth to those who listen to him faithfully, through the voices of his people. Amen.

⁴ Desperatepreacher.com – Resources for June 28, 2020. Hospitality Prayer written by Rev. F. Schaefer.