



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

January 31, 2010
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Derrick Boykin and Robert Tiller

RCL: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

LM: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; Psalm 71:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15, 17; 1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13 or 13:4-13; Luke 4:21-30

[*Editor's note:* In the following reflection, Derrick and Bob were invited to engage in a dialogue about the passages.]

Derrick Boykin's Reflection

In today's reading from Jeremiah, we share in a conversation between God and Jeremiah, the boy prophet. God initiates the dialogue, commissioning Jeremiah to his predestined prophetic assignment. Immediately Jeremiah attempts to relieve himself of this responsibility because of his youth and inexperience. But God deems Jeremiah's reasoning as futile and commands him to boldly proclaim God's Word to the nations. The young prophet need not fear the enormity of the task of speaking truth to those in power, as God encourages him to rely solely on God's protection and deliverance.

As a young black American who has emerged from the abyss of poverty, I am quite aware of the need for fearless, prophetic voices in our day. These voices, be they young or old, will uncompromisingly challenge the current social, political, and economic structures that foster hunger and poverty in our world. Gloomy statistics inform us of the tremendous shortfalls in our social system. It must pain God's heart to see that in 2004 thirty-seven million people in our nation of wealth and material abundance live below the poverty line.¹

We don't have to travel far to see the devastating impacts of poverty. Men and women just a few miles from our nation's Capitol live as subjects to poverty's iron clutch. This reality is not unique to the heart of the District of Columbia. Throughout our country we discover unbelievable deprivation and hopelessness. People of God can never become desensitized to all the suffering around us; we must open our eyes, ears, and hearts to the cries of our brothers and sisters.

1. See <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html> for latest statistics.



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Like Jeremiah, the Church has a prophetic responsibility to be the mouthpiece of God, proclaiming with unparalleled fervor God's truths as placed on its heart. The Church is called to stand bold in the face of adversity and proclaim that poverty and its repercussions must be addressed and remedied and that all people have the right to receive food, shelter, quality health care, and education. For the sake of our nation's prosperity, stability, and longevity, the Church must be that fearless, unwavering prophet in this age, pointing our nation and its decision makers to the way that will bring forth life and not devastation.

Bob Tiller's Response

I agree wholeheartedly that the Church must proclaim God's truth, including the truth that all people have the right to food and other necessities of life. But this proclamation will rarely get through to anyone if it is done angrily or in a way that does not take the hearers into account. Those who seek to communicate for the Church and in the Church must be thoughtful in framing the message.

In today's reading from Luke, Jesus speaks in the synagogue, and his gracious words evoke compliments from his kin and townspeople. But Jesus jumps over the accolades, reminding his listeners of two Old Testament stories. In the first story God passes up the opportunity to send his prophet to assist starving Jews and instead sends Elijah to help a starving Gentile woman. In the second, God passes up the opportunity to heal Israelite lepers and instead sends Elisha to heal a Syrian leper. Jesus' synagogue audience—those who marveled at his words and heaped compliments on him a little earlier—become enraged and attempt to murder him.

I believe this illustrates two truths: one is that God loves those whom we are prone to regard as our enemies, as unclean, as unsaved, and God will find ways to act in love toward them. The other truth is that it is dangerous to go around talking about the first truth. Most people don't want to hear about our responsibility to address hunger and illness among those outside their own group; they don't like reminders that God's mercy may get directed to other ethnic groups, and God's grace toward non-believers. In dire times like famine or illness, we beseech God to take care of our own first, but God surprises and confounds us with demonstrations of love for those who are not our own.

As the Church strives to accept its prophetic responsibility, it must keep in mind that God shows love and compassion toward *all* people, not just our circle. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul reminds us that the world is full of many wondrous things, but the greatest of all is love.



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Derrick Boykin's Reply

As Scripture reveals, God's truth comes in many forms. For the listener it may seem to take the form of anger, but the true motivating essence is love. When Jeremiah and Jesus speak, their words are rooted in love, yet the words are so sharp they cut people right to their bone. They make the comfortable uncomfortable. In the gospel passage Jesus' words move people to the point of retaliating with violence, which is often a cost of being prophetic. Yet, as we advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable in our society, the Church must never shy away from its prophetic responsibility, for in its practice we find a love beyond comprehension.

Children's Time [Derrick Boykin]

Many of us have heard the story about the boy Jesus astonishing the teachers in the Temple of Jerusalem or the story about young David defeating the giant Goliath. Today we find another story about a young person doing great things. It is about Jeremiah, whom God chooses to be God's witness to the children of Israel. It is amazing to know that God asks little people to do big things. Jeremiah speaks out and tells Israel to put God first by treating all people, especially poor people, fairly. Like Jeremiah, no matter your age, you can be God's witness. As you now know, adults are not the only people in the Bible who can speak out for poor and hungry people. God uses little people too!

Musical suggestions [Larry Hollar]

O Young and Fearless Prophet—*The United Methodist Hymnal* 444

Of All the Spirit's Gifts to Me—*The United Methodist Hymnal* 336

The Summons—*Faith We Sing* 2130

Sing Hey for the Carpenter—*Gather Comprehensive* 692

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C
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