

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost 28 August 2016

[Jeremiah 2: 4-13; Psalm 81: 1, 10-16; Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16 Luke 14:1-14](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 17C / Ordinary 22C / Pentecost +15 Aug 28, 2016](#) from Textweek

The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah gives us an insight into the true value of prophesy.

First let's acknowledge that there is a primitive understanding of the prophets and that much of the Church still understands these writings as being a comment from God, through the words of the prophet, to the people of Israel.

However, there is also a much more universal appreciation of the actual process that these ancient writings represent and illuminate; it is an understanding that goes beyond a primitive concept of a controlling and judgmental God who sits above the world and offers a commentary on one particular group of people.

When we look into the Old testament with the enlightenment revealed in Christ, we see the 'word of God' as an utterance of humanity; a part of ourselves in dialogue with another part of ourselves, we hear 'the word of God' from an enfleshed perspective.

The 'process' of prophesy therefore is the process of inner dialogue that gives us an insight into the movement toward our fullest and highest reality of being.

When we look, and when the world looked at the image of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh, the Syrian boy whose image went viral,



[Boy in the ambulance: shocking image emerges of Syrian child pulled from Aleppo rubble](#) The Guardian

we each and all heard the echo of God that Jeremiah heard:

“Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the LORD, 13 for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.”

The process of prophesy, that inner voice, God enfleshed, identifies for us and to us that this is our doing; for when we entered “*the plentiful land*” we defiled it, and turned “*its fruits and its good things*” into an abomination.

However, before we get all defensive about this awful reality check, and before we adopt a 'not me' position, let's remain open to hearing within ourselves what has been illuminated in the text.

We might begin by realizing and appreciating that we did not create the abominations of war, hunger, refugees, injustice and poverty deliberately; we did not do it mindfully; rather it is the result

of what we do mindlessly; and that's where the true value of prophesy is made manifest for it can identify our mindlessness.

Jeremiah uncovers our mindlessness by posing a question: "What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?"

It is not a judgement but an invitation to bring us out from our mindlessness; and we might therefore engage the same question; what part of ourselves has lost touch with the Divine nature that draws us into the fullness and wholeness of humanity?

By attending to the prophetic voice, the echo of God within, that we each and all have, we can become aware of another way of being; we can become the change that we want to see in the world.

The promise of creation, and the promise for humanity is cleverly captured in the gospel parable; "*you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet*"; Jesus illuminates that the very destination of humanity is to attend to the celebration of love and the abundance of creation's fruits.

It is important that we appreciate a parable, in the same way that we've unpacked prophetic writings, this parable is so easily domesticated into a teaching about good manners and a lesson in humility; however, like with Jeremiah's words, there is a much richer truth that we are invited to engage.

When we consider Aleppo, Manus Island and the ever widening divide between rich and poor, the divide between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', and then compare these 'visions' with the reality of a universal invitation to a celebration of love, a wedding banquet, then we see what Jeremiah saw and we see what Jesus saw.

We see that mindlessly we have somehow followed a movement that has "*forsaken... the fountain of living water*", and we "*have dug out cisterns for ourselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.*"

And it is perhaps from that viewpoint, looking with the prophetic eyes we all have, and the Christ-likeness we acknowledged at our baptism, that we can begin the change from mindlessness to mindfulness; perhaps we can 'repent' or turn again toward that invitation we have all received.

At the beginning of the gospel reading, Jesus engages with the religious leaders of his day and he silences them, they have nothing to offer to his understanding, and likewise we also need to look beyond the norms of our culture and the acceptable ways of our society to bring about change and to look toward sharing in a banquet with all.

The texts today are not easy for us to hear, for they present us with a formidable reality check, and they disturb all that we have achieved so far, they question all that we hold on to.

What is also true for us today is that we are also disturbed by the image of Omran; and that disturbance might well be the opening for us to hear Jeremiah, and also for us to more mindfully accept the wedding invitation.

To further provoke us, Jeremiah poses another question;

“Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?”

And most of us can readily name some of idols that Australia worships, both on and off the sports field; we can also nod in agreement to the almost universal idols that we follow mindlessly as part of being Australian; the false gods of consumption, political expediency, and of valuing ourselves by what we have; we even know about climate change and yet still manage to keep it out of mind.

Jeremiah reminds us that we have changed our gods for we ourselves act as if we are God, and we mindlessly claim to be able to do as we please with our property, the earth, and without any regard for others.

We are invited to a wedding banquet; and the last verse of the gospel indicates that we are also invited to be creators of such a banquet;

“when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

In the second reading, Paul encourages the early church to mindfully engage the gospel invitation;

“Let mutual love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

As we begin to accept encouragement and once more look at the reality of the Divine invitation, as we contemplate change, we will also experience the weight of worldly gravity holding us in the status quo of not changing. And we can so easily discard the wedding invitation, I’ve got nothing to wear, what can I do, it won’t make a difference if I do, or don’t attend.

“Let mutual love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

We can and do make a difference by what we do and by what we neglect to do; and perhaps a simple example from the last census will illustrate how we, us here, can make a difference in the world.

There are an estimated **42.5 million** people displaced by persecution and conflict in the world. This breaks down to **15.2 million refugees**, 26.4 million internally displaced persons and 895,000 asylum seekers.

How on earth can we show hospitality to so many strangers?

Let’s look at maybe one small step!

In the last census 2011

there were 960,717 households in Western Australia

and 109,328 were unoccupied.....

already we can see how we have drifted away from the promise of wedding banquet and how we
“have dug out cisterns for ourselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.”

But there's more; the average number of bedrooms per household was 3.3 and the average number of people per household was 2.6.

So let's estimate that there is on average one spare bedroom per household; that's 960,717 spare bedrooms...

Now I'm not going to suggest that we *show hospitality to strangers* by filling up our spare bedrooms; but, what if we contributed \$3.40 per day toward housing strangers for each spare bedroom we have.

\$3.40 per day is the cost of a cup of coffee and it is what it costs to give a home to one of our children in Nepal.

We could make a start, and then imagine if the idea caught on (which is probably what Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul all hoped for); if the idea caught on, then West Australians alone would enable 960,717 refugees to have a home; that's nearly 6% of the total.

It is a simple step that makes a real and mindful response to Paul's plea;

“Let mutual love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

And such simple small steps mean that we all can RSVP and accept the wedding invitation that is divinely given to all.