

Sermon: Stand Up

Silvia Purdie, 21 August 2016, Cashmere

Bible readings:

Jeremiah 1:11-19

Luke 13:10-17

What are the two meanings of 'Hunched'?

Right. Two Bible readings and I'll spend a bit of time in each, see where that takes us.

First, Jeremiah. We heard last week how "The Word of the Lord" came to Jeremiah - his first response was, of course, 'you're kidding, I can't speak for you, I'm too young' ... but God persevered and Jeremiah accepted his prophetic calling.

So together God and Jeremiah make a start ... and the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry starts with him figuring out how to hear from God, how to work out what God is wanting to say to his people. ... which starts with a random picture in his head. Jeremiah sees in his mind's eye a branch of an almond tree. And Jeremiah chooses to sit with that picture in his mind's eye for a while. What's with the almond tree branch?

Here's the thing about how God communicates with us - God tends not to speak English. Or Hebrew, or any other human language. I have met people who have clearly heard God speak audibly to them, just a couple of times in their life, and people have clear phrases that pop into their mind and they trust that to be God's voice to them. But to most people most of the time God speaks in God-language, which we then have to translate into English as best we can. My experience is that God-speak is the stuff of hunches, nudges, strange day-dreamy pictures, waves of emotion, bursts of energy.

So Jeremiah imagines a branch of an almond tree, and plays with it for a while. He says it out loud, in Hebrew, Almond, Shawkade, the first of the trees to flower after the winter, its name meaning 'awakening' ... and into Jeremiah's head comes another word, "Showkade" which means watching ... and as these things click into place that has the ring of rightness about it, which he writes down as "The Lord said to me *"you have seen well, for I am watching over my word to awaken it, to make it happen."*"

The imagining becomes metaphor, the metaphor gains meaning, the meaning becomes language, the language is able to be spoken and written. It's a process.

Then Jeremiah pictures in his mind's eye a boiling pot tipping over and pouring hissing steaming burning over the land to the north, which he

interprets to be a word from God about the political military threats to the tribes in the north, and this is a theme that continues right through his prophecies.

Then a third imagining; Jeremiah sees in the eyes of his imagination a wall around himself, fortifications of bronze and iron, the strongest protection he'd ever seen. And with this image came a sense he had from God of calling, a inner power and drive to literally 'Stand Up' ... standing up, speaking out, proclaiming to the people, to those in authority, to the religious and political leaders of his day, what they did not want to hear. His was a call to challenge, to stir up, to encounter resistance, but he started from this vision of his that he was well surrounded, protected by God, no matter what anyone threw at him.

Jeremiah called his people back into relationship with God. He confronted them with the consequences of losing their faith and their identity as a nation. Jeremiah grieved deeply for his people, for the injustice that he saw, the faithlessness that he identified, for the destruction and violence that he knew in his bones was coming ... as indeed it was. Jeremiah stood up with courage and clarity. He stood up to his people, and as he spoke he dared to speak with the voice and authority of God.

What I wanted to focus on this morning was this glimpse that he gives us of HOW he heard God speaking to him, how he learned to translate the hunches and the pictures of his imagination into words that his people could understand and respond to.

It is central to my conviction that God is communicating with all of us all of the time, pouring out love and truth into our lives. Our problem is that we so easily dismiss this, we pay so attention to it. I invite you to pay more attention to your hunches, your daft imagination, your day dreaming ... I invite you be open to odd coincidences, to nudges ... like when the phone rings just while you're thinking about someone, or when you hear something mentioned a couple of times in the same day, or when you get a strange urge to doodle or write poetry, or to call an old friend. I invite you to pay more attention to the deep desires of your heart, dreams long forgotten, ambitions left unachieved ... it is often through these hidden yearnings that God calls us to 'Stand up'.

I know from my own life that when we do step up, stand up, say yes, this is when God brings more energy and purpose into our lives.

OK? Let's turn to Luke 13, to this fabulous little story of a Sabbath day in Palestine, when Jesus was at worship in a Synagogue. There he is teaching, all eyes are on him, and he notices as he speaks a little old woman hobble in through the door down the back. Just a nobody woman, no one of any importance, she was just slipping in quietly, took her ages to get there because her back was so bent over, her legs shuffled slowly along, she never looked anyone in the eye, no one took much notice of her.

And as she is finding a seat in the women's section down the back Jesus calls out to her, and everyone turns to look as he walks towards her and calls her to come to him and for a long moment the only sound is her sliding shuffling feet on the wooden floor ... until they stand together in the aisle and Jesus places both of his hands onto her gnarled shoulders and says to her "Woman, you are set free" and in front of everyone's eyes she stands and uncurls herself until she sees him face to face

and a fire explodes in her eyes and her mouth opens with a 'wow' of praise and joy and she lifts up her hands, both arms, right above her head in complete freedom of movement, no more pain, and she circles around, proclaiming to all the men, all the women, all the children in that crowded synagogue that God is good, halleluia, Blessed be the Lord! Hosanna!

And her daughters and her friends rush forward and embrace her and she swings them around in a dance of joy and people are clapping and singing and everyone wants to touch her and kiss her

And you almost have to feel sorry for the leader of the synagogue who stamps his stick and yells at the crowd to calm down - this is not right, this should not be done ... this is doctor's work, if you are sick go see a doctor and pay him to heal you but not on a Sabbath for this is not in our laws, this is not right, this is not worship!

And into the confusion and conflict Jesus stands and speaks and they calm down enough to listen to him ... and he says "Wouldn't you care for your donkey on the Sabbath day? This woman, this daughter of Abraham, she is worth more than a donkey, she is worth everything in God's sight. 18 years, 18 long years, she has been bound by suffering, and God has set her free, yes on a Sabbath, especially on a Sabbath! For this is worship, God setting us free."

And there was celebration and feasting in that night in that town.

So, there we have it - two stories, two people whose lives were touched by God, two people with hunches, two people who stood up ... The old woman who was hunched over, bent, burdened, oppressed, who was set free by God at the touch and word of Jesus, free to stand tall. And the young man, Jeremiah, who found the courage and the wisdom to listen to his own hunches - in the pictures in his mind, in an inner determination to stand up

and speak even though his message was unpopular ... and so to hear and to proclaim the word of God in his time and place.

Isn't it wonderful to have Harrison here today, and to celebrate him and the gift that he is and to stand with his family in honouring the work of God in blessing and calling and claiming us

There is much that we cannot know about the future, for Harrison or for any of us. But these things I know ... I know that God loves him, and loves you and me and every child, and that God is continually speaking to us and into the world, calling all people into loving relationship.

Let those who have eyes, see, and those who have ears, hear! Listen with the eyes of the heart, look for the subtle ways of God, in gentle nudges and curious co-incidences.

This I know, that the more we learn of God the more there is to learn.

And I know also that living in this world pulls us against the ways of God.

I know that despite his parents' best efforts Harrison will get dented, dragged down, hurt, bound as Jesus put it, as we all have been.

I pray for Harrison, and I pray for each one of you, that again and again you will know the words of Jesus Christ saying "Be free", and the touch of his hands, his Spirit, lifting you up when you are bent over, pulling you to your feet, looking you in the eye as you stand up.