

Rev. Jeff Nicolas  
Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19  
I Corinthians 12:31-13:13  
Luke 4:21-30

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
January 30-31, 2010

I want to teach you all a word today, a word that captures a certain, scientific happening that goes on in our brains. The word is “ventricular” mechanism. Ventricular mechanism. Anyone heard of that before? Ventricular mechanism is the phenomenon that happens when you hear the same sound over and over again, constantly enough that your brain just shuts it out. People that live next to railroad tracks, for instance. After awhile, you stop hearing the train. Or seminarians at St. Meinrad’s, after awhile you stop hearing the bells. Or my Dad with my Mom – well, I’ll just stop there. After awhile you just get deaf to it.

Now we’ve all experienced ventricular mechanism, we just maybe didn’t know what to call it. It’s actually as pervasive as gravity. Now to counter the effects of ventricular mechanism, we have to add new sounds or sights or sensations to sort of shake things up. But even these varieties eventually will succumb to the deafness that any repeated sound creates in our head, once we’ve become accustomed to that sound, to the change.

Now God who creates the world and all its laws of operating knows well, I believe, the power of ventricular mechanism. God also, it seems to me, knows how to counter it when it comes to communicating his message of salvation to his people. First, God sent the prophets of old. Then, once the people’s ears had become deaf to God’s message, God sent his Son. The Word of God came to live among us. The message and the messenger became one in Jesus Christ.

This is why it is not just what Jesus said, but what Jesus did that communicates God’s message of salvation. By both word and deed, Jesus shared God’s forgiveness, compassion, patience, love and respect for our ability to even say no. Jesus incarnated God’s message. But this did not mean that God’s message was always accepted. Just look at today’s gospel. Last weekend, Jesus’ neighbors loved his message, but today he challenges their presumptions so they try to throw him off the cliff.

The prophet Jeremiah was foreshadowing Jesus when he said, “Stand up and tell them all that I command you. Be not crushed on their account, as though I would leave you crushed before them. For it is I this day who have made you a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of brass against the whole land. They will fight against you, but not prevail over you for I am with you to deliver you says the Lord.”

Jesus’ neighbors flipped on him like a heartbeat. Likes and dislikes come and go. People can be quite fickle, as Jesus came to know all too well. Only God’s truth, God’s word stands firm forever. Eventually a crowd similar to the one on the cliff this morning would succeed in killing Jesus. A crowd that just a day earlier had praised Jesus as triumphant king, laying palm branches on the road as he made his way into Jerusalem. Yet their killing of Jesus – the message and the messenger – would not stand up against God’s resurrection. The light would not be quenched by the darkness. As promised through the prophet, God would deliver his messenger. This is what we celebrate every time we gather around our altar – God wins!

We celebrate something else as well. We celebrate that we are invited to be on God’s team. Now that Jesus Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, we – the Body of Christ in the world – remain to incarnate God’s message of salvation. We collectively as church become God’s message and messenger. We complete and can carry on God’s mission. And with each new person grafted to the Body of Christ by baptism and confirmation in the Spirit, God creates a new messenger to speak God’s word by action and deed.

I believe this variety is how God counters ventricular mechanism. Each of us, in all our diversity and uniqueness, are baptized and confirmed to become God’s incarnate message. In this way, God shakes it up, opens up others to experience salvation.

Now in the past when I’ve prayed on this, I recalled a question that circulated around the internet and found its way into many people’s prayer life. It’s a question that challenged us to consider how we’re doing as messengers of God. The question went like this: “If I were tried in a court of law for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?” Perhaps you remember that old question of faith. I like the question, because when I first heard it, it forced me to examine my past actions. Would I be convicted for being a Christian if I was held up in a court of law with the charge of being a Christian, or would they simply look at my life and say, “oh, I’m sorry, go on your way”?

Well today I've found a better question, one I like more. This new question challenges me to determine my future actions as God's instrument. The new question is this: Lord, what do you want to do through me? Lord, what do you want to do through me? This is a stewardship question. Asking it assumes God chooses to use me. God wants to use me. Asking it assumes that I want to be open to being used by God, putting God's will ahead of my own, God's priorities above my own. Lord, what do you want to do through me? Asking this question places me at God's disposal, trusting that God can use not only my strengths, but also my crosses. Lord, what do you want to do through me, today? This is the question of a disciple.

God uniquely calls each of us by name into service. We are all, by virtue of our baptisms, avenues of grace into the world via our gifts and crosses, our courage and hesitations. Then as we selflessly respond to God's promptings and inspiration, Jeremiah's promise of deliverance to Jesus will become our own. You will not be crushed. The darkness will not prevail over you for I am with you to deliver you says the Lord.

When we put our lives into the service of God, when we with open hearts ask, "God, what do you want to do through me," then our life will be worth living.