



THE NEW SHOFAR

In Christ we are God-planted in the world

Jeremiah 1:4-19 - Luke 4:21-30

Epiphany 4 *God loves us that the divine Love may flow out of us into the world*

Paul picks up one of the most profound, most challenging and eternally unchanging messages of the Lord Jesus... *If I have everything but do not have love, I am nothing.* It is not what we have that is the measure of a man or a woman but who we are as people in the world, people before God. The all-encompassing nature of what Paul says here should not be underestimated:

- ◆ The love a person has for God must be a love manifested in human action
- ◆ must be manifested in the way we love all other people (*no exceptions, none*)
- ◆ **Or**—here is the kicker - our love of God is fatally flawed.

This means *loving* and then *keep on loving them*. It is breaking them down with *love*, healing them with *love*, bringing them to God and eternal life in *love*. No exceptions and no excuses. Only when we refuse to stop reaching out in love can we claim that we do indeed *love* God. If love is not seen, witnessed, experienced or felt, **then there is no love present**. Tough words from Paul!

This ongoing “obsession” with *loving* accepts no obstacles, no time limit, no giving up; it rejects notions of who might be guilty of wrong doing and does not require reciprocal responses in order for it to continue. *Love* endures.

The list of love’s characteristics should be on the lips of every disciple of Christ every moment of every day given our love for God depends on these being fulfilled in all my words and actions... *Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious not boastful not arrogant not rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable is not resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

It is difficult to present a clearer understanding of the way Christ’s disciples manifest their love for God. But it is life consuming, an all-encompassing way of life that defines a faith community and characterises all Christian ministry.

Faith is a fundamental requirement. We need to have hope in God if we are to persevere in discipleship but in the end the love commandment is the greatest requirement... *faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.* Paul’s challenge remains: in what ways is God’s love made manifest to the world through our loving them (actions)?

The most common Greek word for love in the New Testament is *agape*. This love is a life-enhancing action flowing out of God into the lives of men and women, a love that then flows back to God in human words and deeds. Indeed, God is defined as love and when we are commanded to love our neighbour” it is but a command to be to them as God is to them; the God in me reaching out to the God in them. God loved us “while we were still sinners” and this is the model for our relations with others. Faith is all well and good, but if we do not love, then it is a waste of time and effort! What does this mean for our present faith community and the way we need to rethink priorities?

Jesus begins his ministry and was rejected by his own people

Right up here, at the opening of the ministry of Jesus, Luke introduces one of his important messages for the faith community of his own time. They were striving to live their faith in difficult times. We know from the Acts of the Apostles how Luke was presenting the Jesus Community as the reconstituted Israel, the reconstituted People of God who are formed in and around Jesus the Risen Christ. It should come as no surprise then to see how his preaching was rejected by the Jewish leadership. For them these Christians were nothing but an heretical cult and they were cut off from membership in the synagogues and persecuted in every way possible. As it was with Israel in the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah, these new Christians were asking *How long O Lord?* How long do they have to suffer before the Kingdom is clearly established on earth, established with all of the power and glory expected of God?

God sent Jeremiah to the people of Israel calling on them to turn aside from the way they had been going and turn back to the way of the Torah. They were going through a tough time of persecution and exile and they had decided the way to peace was through their political alliances with the Syrians and the Egyptians. Instead of trusting in God and getting on with the work of living the Torah, they trusted instead in what they could do on their own. Jeremiah urged them to get back to the basics of what made them the Congregation of God, aware all the time of how they had God Almighty on their side when they were faithful.

What is the Christian vocation?

The Gospel answer to their concerns was not what they thought it might be. God was not going to send an army of angels to fight on their behalf and throw the Romans from their land and crush their Jewish opponents. That is not the way of the God of Love.

What Luke does offer them is the witness of Jesus the Christ. He too was rejected *by his own people!* But he did not call down bolts of lightning from heaven to wipe them out. He simply persevered in his preaching, teaching and ministry and moved on to new people and communities. He walked away.

Jesus says he was called to those in need—regardless of their ethnic origins or status in the community and uses the example of the prophets Elijah and Elisha to support his claim.

Discipleship is here defined here in terms of addressing the needs of those who are down and out, those on the margins, the least loved and cared for; those the religious and the righteous condemn and ignore. No wonder the people of the city sought to put him to death! He was essentially saying the people of God have lost the plot and are not as righteous as they think they are.

We are God-planted in the world

One of the great insights of Jeremiah into mission was the way he understood his own calling. He was knit together in his mother's womb for the purpose of bringing the word of God to the people of Israel. The point of this was so that Israel could grow to be more faithful in making God known to those pagan among whom they were living. He was ***God-planted*** for a divine purpose. His life had meaning and it had purpose, both of which are understood only in terms of God and what God wanted.

Christ's disciples today are no different; neither are faith communities. We are ***God-planted*** in this place at this time in human history for reasons God alone knows. While we are faithful to that calling we prosper. When we weaken our intimate connections with God in Christ, we struggle to make inroads into the world. What is called for are renewed connections with God - only possible in Christ.

A challenge: put ourselves in the place of the people of Capernaum. God is saying "yes" in Jesus, but they are saying "no". They want God's plan on their terms, fitting their vision. As a new year begins in