

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

Sunday, January 28, 2007

Epiphany 4C

Jeremiah 1:4-10

1 Corinthians 14:12-20

Luke 4:14-21

One of the things that most of us treasure most, is the ability we have to choose. We prize our freedom of choice. We use this gift millions of times each day. Just think of all the things you have chosen or will choose today.

When will I get up this morning, what will I watch, or listen too? I have hundreds of choices on my television, radio or computer. What will I wear? What will I read, what will I drink, what will I eat? Where will I go today, what will I do? Will I work, sleep, or play? Will I eat at home or go to the restaurant. Fast food, Chinese, or Italian? Where will I go to church, will I go to church? Where will I sit, who will I talk too? Later today, what will I do, maybe I will go shopping. Of the hundreds of stores in the area, where will I shop today.....which aisle will I go down. What will I buy? There are millions of possibilities of things I might buy today. Which will I choose?

All these choices. And, lets face it, most of us choose most often that which we find most pleasing. If I like something, I choose it. If I don't like it.....I won't. I mean, seldom do we choose that which we find least pleasing. "I think I will wear that sweater, because it makes me look so awful. Let's go eat there because the food is so lousy. Let's watch that show because I have heard it is just dreadful." We most often choose, based on what it is that we find most pleasing.

Now, I am not going to preach a sermon that encourages you to choose the awful, the lousy, or the dreadful. But, I think there is some wisdom in being open at least to receive some things that are not pleasing.

In the Gospel this morning, Jesus preaches a sermon that succeeded in pleasing no one. Now I have preached bad sermons before, more than I care to admit.....but I can honestly say that not once have I preached sermon that so enraged the congregation that they wanted to throw me off a cliff. In fact, for me the worse sermons just put people to sleep. And in truth, most sermons I preach I am deliberately careful enough not to even get a rise in the congregation's blood pressure. I try to preach sermons that are pleasing to people, that they will like, that will make the congregation like me...Of course, I am not so crass as to decide about whether or not I preach I sermon based on how it might affect their pledge. No I am not that crass. At least, not quite.

I try to preach sermons that will so please the congregation that they will choose to come again next week. If a sermon pleases most of the congregation, if people come up to me after the sermon and tell me that they liked the sermon, I count that as a good sermon.

Shame on me. This morning's gospel speaks in judgment against me. Sermons should not be preached about what people want to hear, but about what they need to hear. Sermons preached to please people are not worth preaching. The best sermons might in fact be the ones that make people so mad that they want to throw the preacher off a cliff.

Jesus upset the townsfolk. He upset them because he challenged some of their deepest convictions. They knew that they were God's "chosen and special" people. How dare Jesus remind them of the story from their own holy writings that in Elijah's day, God came to the pagan widow! How dare he remind them of the story from their own holy writings that God came to the Syrian, Naaman! How dare Jesus challenge their sense of religious and national superiority! How dare Jesus push them to lay aside their prejudices and see that God could work outside Israel! One sermon, his first sermon in his home town, and they wanted to kill him. But, they could not touch him. He walked through their midst because he had an authority. He had an authority, a courage, a confidence that they had never witnessed before. He had authority because he was interested in pleasing God, not the crowd. He

had authority that came from serving God, not the congregation. With that authority, Jesus passed through their midst. They could not lay a hand on him.

A couple of questions come to mind. When was the last time a sermon really made you angry? What was it about? What deeply held convictions of yours did it challenge? As you think about it now, why did it make you mad? Was it a sermon that you needed to hear? What sermon could I preach today that would really make you angry? Would it be a sermon about bigotry? A sermon about respecting your husband, your wife, your children, yourself. Would it be a sermon that called you to forgive someone you didn't want to forgive? Would it be a sermon that spoke of riches and blessings that can be found in same gender relationships? Would it be a sermon about honesty and integrity? Would it be a sermon about how you choose to spend your money? How you choose to spend your time? Would it be a sermon about the things you watch? The magazines you read? Would it be a sermon about gambling? Would it be a sermon about the car you drive, or the house you live in? Would it be a sermon about racism? That almost always makes us angry. Would it be a sermon about the war? Would it be a sermon about sexuality, not someone else's but yours? About how you honor and respect the deep mystery of your sexuality? Would it be a sermon against blind patriotism, against capital punishment, about religious bigotry, or social justice, or caring for the poor? What is the sermon you don't want to hear? What is the sermon that you need to hear?

You know well the sermon that you do not want to hear. You know well the sermon you most need to hear. I can let you preach it to yourself.

What is the sermon you don't want to preach?

Resisting evil and proclaiming the good news of God in Christ is not something that only the priest or preacher is called to do. Resisting evil and proclaiming the good news of God in Christ is a charge given to us in our baptism. Sometimes this means saying things that are not pleasing, saying things that some do not like to hear. Christian disciples are given the responsibility to represent values that run counter to the values of a culture, a people, a nation. Christian disciples are called to make people angry, to say and do not what people want to hear, but what they need to hear. Is there a sermon, a word that God has given you to speak?

So many choices. So many different options. So many ways to choose that which we like, that which is pleasing to us. We are grateful for those choices. We are grateful for the gifts of life that please us.

Today we give thanks also for those things that are less than pleasing. For those things in life that we don't want to see, those things in life we don't want to hear. Today we give thanks for those words we don't like to say, those things we don't like to do. We pray for the courage to do God's will whether it pleases us or not.

We pray for the courage to hear God's word whether we like it or not.