

Occasion: Fourth Sunday after Epiphany [C]

Date: 01-31-2010

Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 4:31-44

Title: "Standing Up! Standing Out!"

Introduction:

In 1952, Florence Chadwick was the first woman to attempt to swim the 26 miles between Catalina Island and the California coastline, off the city of Los Angeles. As she began, she was flanked by small boats that watched for sharks and were prepared to help her if she got hurt or grew tired. After about 15 hours a thick fog set in. Florence began to doubt her ability, and she told her mother, who was in one of the boats, that she didn't think she could make it. She swam for another hour before asking to be pulled out, unable to see the coastline due to the fog. As she sat in the boat, she found out she had stopped swimming just one mile away from her destination. "I'm not trying to excuse myself," she told reporters, "but if I could have seen the land, I might have made it."

Two months later, Chadwick tried again. This time was different. The same thick fog set in, but she made it because she said that she kept a mental image of the shoreline in her mind while she swam. [Concordia Pulpit Resources, Vol. 5, Pt. 1. Pg. 13]

Fog distorts a person's perception of reality. The thicker the fog, the greater the distortion.

Setting:

A people that do not know the Word of God, a people who barely know the Word of God are a people who live in a fog, a people who cannot see reality clearly. The less the people know the Word of God, the greater the fog, the greater the distortion, the less reliable their perceptions.

Today we will learn from the life of a young man whom God called to declare the truth to His people in Judah in the midst of the fog, – a young man whom God gave the "mental image" of the shoreline, the "spiritual image" of His Word, to strengthen him and to keep him resolute in his calling to summon those lost in the fog to repent and return to the clarity of God's Word, or to find certain disaster and ruin in the midst of the murkiness of their own corruption and sin. Today we will look at the call that God gave to Jeremiah to serve Him as a prophet and find in Jeremiah an example of how to see clearly, even when many around you are lost in the fog.

I. THE FOG OF CORRUPTION:

Jeremiah lived in the waning years of the kingdom of Judah, and the reign of the descendants of king David in Jerusalem. God's Word for generations had been ignored and forsaken by the people of Judah. While king Josiah had sought to restore the people to living by the Covenant God had made with the Israelites and Moses, his efforts at reform died when Josiah (640-609 B.C.) himself died. The people of Judah never fully embraced his efforts, and the fog of their corruption never lifted from them.

Early in his ministry as a prophet, God told Jeremiah to declare:

"If you will return, O Israel, return to Me," declares the LORD.

"If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray,
²and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear,

'As surely as the LORD lives,'

then the nations will be blessed by Him and in Him they will glory."

³This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem:

"Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns.

⁴Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts,
you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem,

or My wrath will break out and burn like fire

because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it.

– Jeremiah 4:1-4

But the people of Judah were lost in the fog of their own corruption. They refused to listen to Jeremiah, and instead groped along in the murkiness thinking that they could find their own way by their own distorted perspective of what was right. God described the people of Judah:

²²My people are fools; they do not know Me.

They are senseless children; they have no understanding.

They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good." – Jeremiah 4:22

When Florence Chadwick realized her perspective was clouded by the fog and she was uncertain about her efforts to swim the channel, she did the wise thing, she went for what she knew was secure, she got into the boat. But the people of Judah did the opposite. They continued to live in the fog, no one knowing the right way to go, yet everyone giving directions as though they knew for certain.

³They bend their tongue like their bow; Lies and not truth prevail in the land;

For they proceed from evil to evil, And they do not know Me," declares the LORD.

⁴"Let everyone be on guard against his neighbor, And do not trust any brother;

Because every brother deals craftily, And every neighbor goes about as a slanderer.

⁵"Everyone deceives his neighbor And does not speak the truth,

They have taught their tongue to speak lies; They weary themselves committing iniquity.
⁶ "Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit; Through deceit they refuse to know Me," declares the LORD. – *Jeremiah 9:3-6*

Judah was going in almost every direction, but no one was going in the right direction. Idolatry, immorality, greed, corruption, fraud, abuse of others, deception, perjury. A society unmoored to the Truth of God's Word is adrift on the sea of false assumptions and distorted perspectives. What was true of Judah, is true of our society, our culture today. As a society, the general population has cut the line that held us to the Truth of God's Word. We legislate, we govern, not by the certainty of the Truth of God's Word, not by the clear moral guidelines of the Scripture, but by the distorted and fogged perceptions of the ungodly. Our media in the movies, television, and print, has a heavy liberal bias that rejects the moral Truth of Scripture and exults a sensual and base message of the corrupt desires of the flesh. Our financial system has pursued a reckless course of greed, over-leveraging, and under-funding our major loans and contracts. Our political system has mortgaged our future for the funding of our present excess of social programs and spending. Only now is America and many nations of the world beginning to experience the consequences of our moral, financial and political bankruptcy.

So, what can be done? What can we do? In the midst of the fog, in the midst of a people groping in the murkiness, we need to be grounded on what we know is certain, true and trustworthy.

II. THE CLARITY OF TRUTH:

When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, the first thing God did was to ground Jeremiah in what is True and Trustworthy – God's Word.

⁷You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. ⁹Then the LORD reached out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put My words in your mouth. ¹⁰See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

– *Jeremiah 1:7-10*

The only way that we can navigate the fog of the society around us is to go in the direction that God's Word points us. When so many around us are going every which way but the right way, we do not want to listen to them and their distorted perceptions. Instead of being guided by the media, by the culture, we want to follow what God has revealed in His Word. Instead of trusting the compromised and self-serving ways of most politicians, and the laws they legislate, we seek to stand upon the Laws and the Word that God has given us.

In the Gospel Lesson (Luke 4:31-44), we heard how the people were amazed at Jesus and said to each other, "**What is this teaching? With authority and power He gives order to evil spirits and they come out!**" The Word of God, the Word spoken by Jesus, has authority! Authority to direct our lives! Authority to confront and overcome evil!

Like Jeremiah, God has reached out and touched us today! God has touched each of us personally, as He put His Name upon us in our Baptisms and has said, "You are mine! I have called you by name!" By the power of God's Word and God's Holy Spirit, God has opened our eyes to see the Truth in the Gospel! God has called us to repentance of the corruption within our hearts, and to embrace in faith the forgiveness of sins and the New Life in Christ. Now, we forsake the fog, we renounce the distorted and corrupt perceptions of our flesh, and we take hold of the Truth of God's Word. The apostle Paul expressed it this way as he wrote to the Ephesian Christians:

²¹Surely you heard of Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. – *Ephesians 4:22-24*

Instead groping in the fog, we can live in the Truth and Certainty of God's Word, as a New People, a people set apart from what is corrupt, a people in the image and likeness of God.

Conclusion:

No doubt, if you are a person who stands upon the Truth of God's Word, a person who stands upon the Cross of Christ, renouncing sin and corruption and embracing Truth and Righteousness, you will not only be standing up, but be standing out. God told Jeremiah:

¹⁷"Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. ¹⁸Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. ¹⁹They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. – *Jeremiah 1:17-19*

When you stand upon the Lord, you will stand out against the backdrop of those lost in the fog. Your voice will be the voice calling out and pointing people in the right direction. Like with Jeremiah, some will despise you and reject what you say. But the Lord will stand with You. How blessed you are, to stand upon the Truth and to stand out for the Lord! AMEN