

EPIPHANY: CELEBRATING GOD'S GIFT FOR ALL PEOPLE

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
January 31, 2010

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

When the Message Is an Inconvenient Truth

There is cause for concern as we witness a falling away from the faith; a steady decline in the numbers of people who are willing to stand up for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As church leaders scramble to find ways to bolster sagging membership, some may not deem it incongruous to bend the tenets of God's commands so that those who attend worship services are not challenged by a message which exhorts them to live by godly standards. When leaders try to please everyone, they ultimately end up pleasing no one.

In responding to God's call, Jeremiah was told that he would have to carry God's message to the nations—a message of “doom and destruction, and of rising and rebuilding again” (Jeremiah 1:9b, *CEV*). Surely, Jeremiah would not win many friends with such a message. It was an inconvenient truth, one that God did not want sugar-coated, one that would be spoken with authority, and one in which no words would be left out (7b).

If the truth be told, many of us do not like to hear the truth, especially if it is levied at us in a bold, in-your-face manner. No doubt Jeremiah knew this and tried to argue his way out of being God's messenger. But God was grooming this young man, who was probably in his late teens or a mere 20 years old, to be a witness and take God's Word to the people of Judah.

In the Luke pericope, Jesus, who was appointed by God to take the message of the Good News of salvation not just to the people of Israel, but to the whole world, preaches his inaugural sermon. Again, it was an inconvenient truth. Who was this young rabbi, the son of a local carpenter, who would stand before the people and the teachers of the Law and proclaim that the prophetic Scriptures that he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah “has come true today”? (Luke 4:21, *CEV*).

They pondered his words, amazed at the breadth of his learning, but yet angry at his message. It was their inability to accept the truth that God's kingdom was indeed at hand

that caused Jesus to remind them “no prophets are liked by the people of their own hometown” (Luke 4: 24b, *CEV*).

The truth hurts—especially in those areas of our lives where there is sin. Yet, like a double-edged sword, God’s Word “can cut through our spirits and souls... until it discovers the desires and thoughts of our hearts” (Hebrews 4:12, *CEV*). It is imperative, then, that we share the truth of God’s Word and “do it willingly, even if it isn’t the popular thing to do” (2 Timothy 4:2a, *CEV*).

Despite the opposition we face, we are told in the reading from 1 Corinthians that it is our love for God and for each other that will save the day. “Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or rude. Love isn’t selfish or quick tempered” (13:4, 5a, *CEV*). Yes, unlike many of us, love “doesn’t keep a record of the wrongs that others do. Love rejoices in the truth,” (1 Corinthians 13:5b, 6a) however inconvenient it may seem.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Dorette Saunders, former Senior Editor in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship at the American Bible Society.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Estonia – With thanks to God for supportive donors and for the long-awaited Gospel of Mark in Estonian Sign Language, and with prayers for funding to continue translating the Old Testament into modern Estonian, and for efforts to develop new ways of reaching more people with God’s Word; **Lithuania** – With thanks to God that the Good News first reached Lithuania a thousand years ago and that people of different denominations are still discovering and rediscovering Scripture despite secularization and growing neo-paganism, and with prayers for the Lithuanian nation and for the permanent conversion of the people, and that Bible work can continue despite the recession; **Latvia** – With thanks to God for movement toward completing the new Bible translation, and with thanks for Bible Society supporters, and with prayers for an improvement of the overall economic situation in Latvia, for a more favorable taxation system for publishers, and that projects temporarily suspended can be resumed.

Activity Corner: “Gifts of Love” Hearts

Supplies needed: Bible; red 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper; scissors; pens or pencils.

Read together 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. Invite everyone in your household to cut out a heart (fold the construction paper in half length-wise and cut from the fold to the bottom of the paper) and to copy 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 on one side of the heart, but replacing the words “Love is” and “love/it does not” with “I am” and “I do not.” Encourage everyone to think of something helpful they could do for someone else, write it on the reverse side of the heart, and present their heart with the stated “gift” of kindness to the intended recipient.

