

## Way Ahead of Us and Always with Us

4 Epiphany, Year C, RCL. Jeremiah 1:4-10. Psalm 71:1-6. 1 Corinthians 13:3-13. Luke 4:21-30. February 3, 2019. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

“I’m way ahead of you!”

The only one who can say that and be right every time is God.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you.” (Jeremiah 1:5)

The call of Jeremiah in today’s Old Testament reading is a dramatic reminder that the endless minute we call present time always rides on the endlessness of God: God who has no beginning, no end, but only presence.

I’ve said more than once that our existence depends on the existence of God, which is to say that God is always prior to us. That works however you define time. God operates in time, but time does not constrain him. Time depends on him, for it is one of the characteristics of this creation we are a part of, which, again, depends on God.

That is one of the most reassuring truths I know, because, given another vitally reassuring truth—that God loves and cares for his creation—it means that even before we came into being God was aware of us and therefore our existence has always meant something. Our lives mean something, they have purpose, they have importance, they have value—because from before time and forever (Jude 1:25) God has cared for us and will never stop.

This is based on the third most important truth I know: that God’s nature and purposes are constant. He isn’t whimsical, distractible or cranky, like pagan Gods. In his constancy and in his priority God is very unlike us, so that he can say in scripture, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.” (Isaiah 44:8) Nevertheless, we are called to get acquainted with God and to imitate divine reliability as best we can, centering on that quality of faithfulness called steadfast love. Because the greatest truth of all is that second truth I mentioned: God is love, and this love thing—we get it. This is something our creaturely natures respond to. God pretty obviously shares with us the quality of wanting to be in loving relationship with beings other than himself.

This is why St. Paul goes on so wonderfully in the famous panegyric to love we heard this morning, and which we also hear so often in wedding ceremonies. You see, brothers and sisters in Christ, this love thing is anything but romantic drivel. It’s what the whole universe is based on. It has to do with God’s faithfulness, his self-expression, why he bothered to create anything at all, why he has been going to so much trouble to fix creation, the whole ball of wax. It’s all about love. Really. It’s in the Bible. Right where we read it this morning. And it never goes away. It can’t. It’s based on the Lord of time, space, matter, relationship, meaning and truth.

So when God tells poor young Jeremiah not to be scared of his prophetic calling, he’s not saying there won’t be challenges, resistance, all that negative stuff that can go with answering God’s loving faithfulness with our loving obedience. If Jesus had to deal with that negativity (as we heard, for example, in today’s Gospel reading) how can we expect not to have to face it ourselves? Evil’s resistance to God does not make God’s call go away. It does mean that if we persevere in faith the God who is love will support us and love’s triumph is assured.

Because God was there first. He’s way ahead of us. He was there before it all got started and he’ll be there beyond the end and he’ll be there at every instant in between. We can count on it.