



## Proper 6, Year C – February 14, 2010

Jeremiah 17: 5-10

### A Homily preached by the Rev'd James Popham

Jeremiah was a prophet.

His message today, though brief, is worth hearing on this final Sunday before Lent begins on Wednesday. Lent is a time of repentance, which involves soul-searching. And a prophetic voice can be handy when we engage ourselves in any kind of self-assessment. We all need someone to yank our chains. To hold up the mirror. To force us to see what our lives are really about and confront us with who we really are. To see our lives in a perspective not limited by the blinders of self interest, self righteousness, or even self preservation. This is what prophets do best.

And we all have them in our lives. A best friend. A parent (inevitably). A spouse (also, inevitably, if one is married). A brother. A sister. A child. A boss. And as much as we may resent it at the moment they hold up the mirror, we know when the image of ourselves we see does not measure up to who we think we are or what we want to be. And we are provided a moment of potential transformation. This is what prophets do. They issue invitations to transformation. To growth. To being the loving and compassionate person we would like to be all the time. But sometimes are not. A true prophet, like Jeremiah – like our parents, perhaps – therefore must be relentless. We know they must be inspired by God. Otherwise, they would throw up their hands and leave us to our own devices. But no matter how often we stumble or how often we fall, they keep on holding up the mirror and hoping beyond all hope that we can get the message and live it.

I should not neglect that many of us also are called to be prophets. And I do not mean standing on the mountain top and calling for some worldwide reform. I mean being a prophet to someone placed in our path by God. Parents by definition are prophets. And since all of us have been children, we know how frustrating we made the job of prophet for our parents. As an only child, I may have been outnumbered by my two parents, but I know I tested them with a ferocity that could not have been equaled by a houseful of siblings. If there is truth to the notion that as parents we suffer according to the amount of grief we gave our parents, then it is no wonder that I became a parent to five children. It took that many to create that equilibrium. But as a parent-prophet, I must say that despite the frustration, those five children in many ways lead more Godly lives than I do. And I like to think that my prophetic role in their lives – though very imperfect – made an impression.

So, when we are called to be prophets, we must not resist, despite our natural inclination to do so. Jeremiah resisted and launched into a litany of excuses, as if he were telling God something God did not already know. God knows our petty, whiny excuses before we utter a word, and still God calls us at one time or another, at one place or another to a prophetic role. At that

time and place, we are to shine God's light and illuminate a dark corner of the world, or just one someone's life, that needs to be seen as it truly is.

Prophecy is a burden, whether we are on the giving or receiving end. None of enjoys confronting our shortcomings, and few, if any of us, enjoy pointing their failings out to others. But prophecy is integral to life in community, to love of God, and to love of neighbour.

And Lent is a time when we are specially called to prophetic, transforming moments. It is a time for unrelenting honesty with ourselves and with others. It is a time to acknowledge the dark places below the surfaces of our lives and to shine the light and let the light in. It is time to hear the prophets that speak to our lives and to speak prophetically to the lives of others that cross our paths.

And as Jeremiah's life and his poetry this morning remind us, prophecy is God's work, work we undertake with God's promise of support. So in those moments when a prophet intervenes to our discomfort or when we become the prophetic heralds of Godliness, we must trust that the moment enjoys God's special presence and that, indeed, no matter how difficult the moment may be, it will bear fruit.

Amen.