

# The Spirit Unleashed!

By: Meagan McLaughlin

January 30, 2022. For centuries we have believed in a “zero-sum game,” that there are limited resources available, and if we extend resources to those who have none, there will be less left for the rest. But today we hear that God promises to be with us all the way, and that there will always be enough.

Readings: [Jeremiah 1:4-10](#), [1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#), [Luke 4:21-30](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

I remember when I was newly on a board for a conference planning committee, and I was chosen to be the committee co-chair. The chair, among other things, was responsible for facilitating the joint meetings of the board and the committee, a gathering of about 40 people, a responsibility that would be mine if they needed to be absent for any reason. My immediate reaction, as I thought about the possibility that I might need to step in to chair the meeting, or that I might be chosen as chair the following year, was panic. There is no way I can do this, I thought. I can't possibly facilitate a meeting like that. They've got the wrong person.

In our first reading today, Jeremiah has a similar reaction when he hears God's call for him. Maybe some of you can relate as well, as Rachel was just talking about. “You say you've known me since the womb, but honestly, what are you thinking, appointing me to be a prophet to the nations? Just look at me! I'm too young! I can't speak your words to all these people. You're going to have to find someone else. I'm not worthy. I don't have what it takes.”

And as we read on, we can hardly blame Jeremiah for trying to beg off what God is asking him to do. It's not as simple as it sounds at first, after all. God has appointed Jeremiah “over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” In other words, God is calling Jeremiah to challenge the powers and empire of his day, and turn the world upside down.

Jesus' ministry is no less disruptive. Mary sang in the Magnificat that God had scattered the proud, lifted the lowly, brought down the powerful, filled the hungry, sent the rich away empty. And as we heard last week, when Jesus preaches in the synagogue at Nazareth for the first time, he reads Isaiah's words claiming release for the captive, freedom for the oppressed, and good news for the poor — turning the world upside down.

And in today's gospel, when Jesus tells his listeners that these words have been fulfilled in their hearing, and that they really mean what they say, his friends, neighbors, and family find it so radical and hard to accept that they try to push Jesus off a cliff.

Interestingly, it seems as if one of the specific things about what Jesus said that his neighbors were angry with was that this message of good news was not just for them, who knew Jesus best. Jesus belongs to God, not Joseph, he says. In fact, the Spirit often carries the promises to the very last person you would expect, even going to them first of all. Jesus' neighbors rage, believing that if others benefit from the good news, there will be less left for them, perhaps even nothing.

A group from Christ Lutheran is reading *The Sum of Us*, by Heather McGhee, and in it she fleshes out

what she refers to as our nation's "zero-sum game." For centuries, we have believed that there are limited resources available, and if we extend resources to those who have none there will be less left for the rest.

Specifically, those who hold the most resources have lifted up the narrative that if money, time, and freedom are available to those on the margins, who they say do not actually deserve these resources — usually starting with people of color, and extending to immigrants, people living in poverty, people with disabilities — these people who they say do not deserve the resources. And those who don't deserve the resources in their estimation are the ones who will suffer the most from it.

Jesus' neighbors may have bought into their own zero-sum game. When Jesus tells them that a prophet is not accepted in their hometown — that those who know a prophet best often reject the prophetic voice and therefore miss the working of the Spirit among them — they hear him saying that the Spirit is going to skip them entirely. And they lose it. The prophet is indeed, as Jesus predicted, rejected in their hometown.

Clearly, the call we have to follow the Spirit who unleashes herself among us is harder than it seems. We are called not to comfort and ease, but to commitment to love in action. We're called to go out of our safe places right to the margins, to challenge the powers that oppress and impoverish and imprison, and speak words that, if we're honest, even we may not want to hear. That's what we're called to as people of faith.

This is radical. Sometimes, like Jeremiah, we want to say we just can't do it. Find someone else. Sometimes, like the people of Nazareth, we want to take the bold hometown prophet who is calling us to transform in ways that make no sense to us, and throw him off the cliff, rather than listen to another word. Sometimes, like the Corinthians, we distract ourselves by clinging to old ways of thinking, ranking ourselves and earning our place, rather than following Christ into the kin-dom work of love in action.

Today, we have our annual meeting, and we reflect on the ministry that our congregation has experienced in the last year. We recognize the council who has invested all they have in leading us through the incredibly challenging time that has been 2020 and 2021. We see the creativity, energy, time, and excellence of our staff as they have reinvented their roles more than once since COVID began. We celebrate how we as a congregation, in the midst of our weariness, fear, and frustration, have followed the Spirit's lead in so many ways.

We hear the call of Jesus, the call of God that came to Jeremiah, all the prophets, and to us today. We recognize that, as Jeremiah learned and as Rachel pointed out, each of us has gifts that we are called to share for the good of the world. The Spirit has been unleashed among us, and we follow that Spirit's lead, to carry the message of God's promise out of our comfortable spaces, right to the margins. God doesn't promise it will be easy — in fact, it probably won't — but God does promise to be with us all the way, and that is enough. There will always be enough. May the Spirit fill us with love that guides all we do, and embolden us to share the good news as we welcome and serve within our walls and well beyond.

Thanks be to God.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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