

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal, Proper 19C, Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28, Psalm 14 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

I have a distinct memory from nine years ago of Gigi Baker reading today's passage from Jeremiah while her daughter Tori watched proudly from the Red Carpet. When Gigi read "They are stupid children," Tori's eyes got huge and she gasped audibly. Tori was not allowed to say that word. How could her mother use those words in *church*?

Such a great question. Kids often have the best questions, don't they? How can these angry words of judgment be in God's holy writ?

I've been hammering home the past few weeks how God loves us but also has expectations of us, but it's hard to hear about "stupid children" and the earth being waste and void and cities laid in ruins. We don't want to hear about Lord's fierce anger.

Last Thursday night, Hebrew Bible Professor (and pastor) Lisa Davison joined our book club via Zoom. She said about God's anger, "Would you rather worship a God who was indifferent?"

What a great question. Would you? I would not.

We do not worship an indifferent God. We worship a God who wants an intimate relationship with us. A God who cares about our feelings and our actions. God tells the people through Jeremiah, "For my people are foolish, they do not know me."

They do not know me.

I can't speak for you, but I feel convicted by that assertion. I am one who constantly insists that the Lord is unknowable and that it's all a mystery.

And yet: God wants to be in relationship with us, from the Garden of Eden to the incarnation to the resurrection. God wants to be known to us. We may never understand God, but God wants us to try.

The people of Judah weren't even trying anymore. Jeremiah spoke to them again and again, but they weren't having it. We will continue to hear the heartbreaking book of this prophet in the coming weeks. Today I want to focus on knowing God, and on hope.

A couple of weeks ago I was a speaker at a retreat at Manakin Episcopal Church that several of you went to. In between sessions, one woman from another church came over to me and asked me to "Define prayer in one or two sentences." I said something along the lines of, prayer is a way for us to be in relationship with God. Sometimes we talk, and sometimes we listen.

I've been thinking about that question and I haven't changed my answer, but if I were asked that question in light of today's reading, I might say that prayer is a way for us to *know* God, so that we can be in relationship.

We heard that God wants to be known not only in today's Jeremiah reading but also in the psalm, when the Lord looked down to see if there was any who was wise, defined in the next line as "one who seeks after God."

Do you seek after God?

The Episcopal church is a wonderful way to seek after God. A perfect place to imperfectly learn how to pray. We have the words of our prayer book to guide us in talking to God. Words that are steeped in scripture. We have Sunday Eucharist and Morning and Evening Prayer, and Compline. So many treasures in all of those rites that have steeped into my soul. Episcopalians, remember, pray what we believe.

I'm a word lover, so Sunday and Wednesday services as well as Wednesday Bible study are my most important devotions of the week—the major way I know God— but others find God in different ways.

Some really value fellowship after the service, which I used to find baffling but the longer I'm here and the deeper I learn to love all of you, the more I understand that.

Many of you know God through music, and while I mostly attended quiet services when I was a layperson, I have grown to appreciate connecting to God through music, especially after the shutdown that prevented us from singing for so long. Now I even like some of the more “contemporary” songs that we sometimes sing here. I can honestly say that I was excited about both our first and final hymns today, even though they vary in style.

Others primarily seek or find the Lord outside of church, like in sunsets or otherwise in nature. We are all called to *intentionally* seek God. Not being able to ever fully know God or solve the mystery of God does not absolve us from trying. God wants to be in relationship with us. I think this morning's rant in Jeremiah shows God's frustration over people not knowing God, and it makes me think of how those we love the most can sometimes make us the angriest.

That rant from Jeremiah, however, does contain a seed of hope. The “stupid children” line that so horrified little Tori is really just the beginning. We get fierce anger as well, and then “The whole land shall be a desolation.” But then, “yet I will not make a full end.”

“I will *not* make a full end.” This leaves room for hope. I'm sure that hope helped Jeremiah to feel less like he was preaching to a lost cause. And we are here today, a faith community that came out of the surviving remnant of the destruction of Jerusalem in Judah.

In Psalm 14, which was selected to go with the distasteful reading in Jeremiah, we also get some hope, because we are encouraged to call upon the Lord in verse four. If your impulse when you are happy or crushed or angry is to call upon the Lord, then you are on the way to knowing God. We also heard that God is in the company of the righteous and that the Lord is their refuge.

God wants to be in relationship with us, which means expressing not only our praise and thanksgiving but also lament. Sadness. Anger. Fear. Call upon the Lord in all times. We get to know people by expressing ourselves to them and by watching them and listening. God knows us, but we hear from the Bible today that God also wants to be known *by* us. What next step will you take to deepen your knowledge of God?