

“Now What?”
Jeremiah 1:4-10
Psalm 71:1-6
1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Luke 4:21-30

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:7-8a, “It [Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” God’s love has your back...my back...humanity’s back. Love wins!

Now what? We love because God first loved us.

The voices of the prophet Jeremiah and Jesus were quickly rejected by the prominent, powerful, and well established. Jeremiah brought news that God would use him to pluck up, pull down, destroy, overthrow, build, and plant. God was on the move. Jesus stated that the Scripture he read from Isaiah was fulfilled in him and was the truth (*aletheia*). Jesus was on the loose. The downcast, marginalized, and poor received the voices of the prophet Jeremiah and Jesus.

Although some decisions that impact us seem arbitrary, they are not. God has ordered the days of our lives. Psalm 71:3 reads, “Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.” As circumstances can so easily consume us and we’re about to go under, God becomes a respite. God provides landing places, like a lily pad for frogs as they rest and move across the pond to land.

In life, lily pads appear along the journey. They are a place for us to rest, regain composure, and reflect. Anne Lamott writes, “My coming to faith did not start with a leap but rather a series of staggers from what seemed like one safe place to another. Like lily

pads, round and green, these places summoned and then held me up while I grew.”¹ The lily pads are experiences with a friend, a connect group, silent reflection at home or in a worship service, reading the Bible and praying to name a few. Those experiences remind us that we are truly loved by God. Only God’s unconditional love can define us, not the voices of those who say we are not lovable.

The prophet Jeremiah is recorded to prophesy these words in Jeremiah 1:6, “Ah, LORD God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” God’s unconditional love for Jeremiah led him to face his fear, anxiety, inadequacy, and resentment with resolve. Jeremiah stood in the tradition of Moses and Gideon who, like him, were asked to do things for which they felt inadequate.

Following Jesus’ disclosure in the synagogue that the reading in Isaiah was fulfilled in the people’s hearing, the Jews were amazed and spoke well of him. Initial amazement turned to hostility, as the audience took exception to Jesus. Jesus told them that when the prophets of Israel had been faced with similar disbelief, they performed their mighty works outside Israel. The people became angry. A lynch mob mentality emerged. They ran Jesus out of town and took him to the top of a hill to push him off a cliff. Luke 4:30 reads, “But he [Jesus] passed through the midst of them and went on his way.”

Several years ago, following a sermon, a member of that congregation said to me, “When you make me think outside the box, I become paralyzed. Help me to be encouraged that paralysis can lead to mobility.” My response. Act on what God has revealed to you no matter the paralysis. Don’t miss God’s activity. For example, when we admit that we believe God heals and then pray for someone, we are outside the box.

¹Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 3.

When we stop to listen to the non-binary person's story and are gracious, we are outside the box. When we include the person who is different than ourselves, whether that be one's ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, or gender identity, we are outside the box.

Epiphany, the Baptism of the Lord, and the Transfiguration of Jesus remind us that Jesus Christ has come for everyone. We are God's agent, individually and as a community of faith, to manifest God's favor to everybody; Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor and the religiously hurt, skeptical, and unbelieving in the world. All are waiting to experience an honest, engaged, authentic, welcoming, and vulnerable Christian in their life.²

You are loved by God. No strings attached! The former pastor of Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas, Blair R. Monie writes, "In whatever context we find ourselves, from a makeshift chapel in a borderlands refugee center to a suburban megachurch, how we respond to messages of liberation and justice will reveal much about how we receive the Word."³ The written Word is the Bible. The living Word is Jesus. Now what? Embrace liberation and justice. Share the good news of God's unconditional love with others. Let's get at it! Amen.

This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 30 January 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

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²In preparation of this sermon, I have benefited from the thinking of L. Daniel Hawk, Donald K. McKim, Rhodora E. Beaton, Shannon Craigo-Snell, Cynthia A. Jarvis, Warren Carter and Blair R. Monie in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 208-210, 211-212, 213-214, 215-217, 217-218, 219-221, and 221-222.

³Blair R. Monie in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 1*, 222.