

Sermon—Madison Christian Community (Advent Lutheran)
Rev. Sonja L. Ingebritsen
January 31, 2016
Jeremiah 1:4-10, Ps 71:1-6, I Corinthians 13:1-13, Luke 4:21-30

“Called Forth; Called Out”

Let us be in the spirit of prayer. May the words spoken, and the words received, be only in your service, great God of Love. Amen.

Earlier this month, after seeing how Rose Hamid, a Muslim American was treated so horribly when she staged a sit-in at a trump rally, Kaddie Abdul, also a Muslim American, decides to go to a Trump rally herself. She made sure she wouldn't be mistaken. She wears a bright orange hajib and carries a large Qur'an. She stood in line with others waiting to get into the rally, silently reading the Qur'an, waiting for Trump supporters to engage in civil conversation with her.

In writing about her experience in *The Guardian* she says, “Before this weekend, I'd never staged any sort of civil disobedience act . . . But Hamid inspired me to make myself visible to the kind of people the media suggest hate me, and to make myself available for their edification. . . .”

Aside from icy stares from some, Kaddie reports that nothing bad happened to her, and she did have a few opportunities for meaningful, thought brief, conversation. But she knew that she took a risk. “It's important,” she writes, “for people to stand up peacefully for the right things, even if we are confronted with physical and verbal intimidation.”

In the end, Kaddie felt she had an opportunity to put a human face on Muslims for those at the rally. And the inverse was also true. She writes, “It was worth it, to me, to recognize their humanity, too.”

We who follow the way of Jesus don't have a corner on the market of prophetic love. But we recognize prophetic love as the kind that Jesus said his ministry was about: to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recover sight to the blind, and set at liberty those who are oppressed. It was an old refrain from the prophet Isaiah that the writer of Luke set in Jesus' mouth.

There's a beautiful book by Philip Hallie called *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*. It's a testimony to the people of Le Chambon, a small, seemingly insignificant village in France, who together hid and saved the lives of Jewish refugees during World War II, many of them children. The whole town took a huge risk in doing so, and some paid with their lives. As Hallie writes: “If you stand firmly opposed to overwhelming destructive power, you expose yourself to destruction.”

So why did they do it? Why did they, who weren't trained in covert operations and didn't know those they were about to save, take such a risk? Why did they feel it was so important to live into the scripture mandate in Deuteronomy to become a city of refuge to strangers? Perhaps

it had to do with this, a description Hallie gives of one of the women involved in the rescue effort. “Her eyes,” he says, “are praying to God while they are open and while they are looking at the world.”

While I was in Carbondale, I had my own kind of call to prophetic love in the area of racial justice. And I sure didn’t feel up to it! But it was a persistent call.

One day Margaret Nesbitt called to ask me to testify to the city council against a special use permit for a proposed solar plant in the African American neighborhood. I stammered as much as Jeremiah did. For one, I was conflicted. I was an advocate of solar power, so why would I want to put myself on the side opposing it? I didn’t understand why the neighborhood was against such a project. What would I even be able to say?

But what I’d come to understand was that Ms. Nesbitt was a grandmamma elder of the African American community in town. If Ms. Nesbitt asked you to do something, that meant it was important, and you’d better have a darn good reason to say no to her. And so, I went to the city council meeting. I couldn’t fairly speak against the project, but I could say with integrity that the neighborhood voices deserved to be heard. I could ask, with them, for a moratorium on the decision so that there could be further discussion and a consensus decision could be made with those most likely to be impacted by the construction and operation of the industry.

That’s what I did. It was only later that I learned that the solar array was being built on the site of a former wood processing plant, where hundreds of thousands of gallons of creosote and other carcinogenic chemicals had been used over the course of almost 100 years. It was a plant that had, in a systematic way, employed African Americans for the most dangerous jobs, exposing them and their families to toxic waste. It was only later that I had a firm grasp of the issues of environmental racism. Creosote was still being pumped out of the ground, and neighbors who lived closest to the plant feared that a new industry—of any kind—on the still polluted land was dangerous to them.

And so it was later that I spoke more forcefully to the council against the new development until there could be restorative justice for the people whose lives were still being affected by the toxic waste dump. And as I became a louder voice alongside the Northeast neighbors, around this and other issues, I became persona non grata with city officials, the white environmentalists, and others. But I couldn’t *not* continue. It was the right thing to do. Even though I was uncomfortable with the role, I knew my solidarity was more important than my comfort.

Isn’t this what we hear in our scripture readings this morning? Jeremiah, a child apprentice in the temple, is called out of his sleep—numerous times until he realizes who it is that is calling—to step into a position of calling out the religious and political elite of his time. I can’t, I’m only a child. You want me to do what? Be a prophet to the nations? Yahweh, come on! Who will listen to me? And you want me to say *what*? I can’t. I really can’t. I don’t even want to.

But God’s call was persistent. And God backed up the call with a holy assurance: “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you. . . . I have put my words in your mouth.”

We can say we love, but if all we do is say it instead of live, of what use is our love? But living the love that is patient and kind and does not seek its own interest carries risk, for many

reasons. Not least of these is that this kind of God-inspired love often takes us to journey into danger waters—we may risk life or reputation. We may, like Rose Hamid and Kaddie Abdul and the villagers of Le Chambon and Jeremiah, be called to expose the status quo and work for destruction and overthrow of unjust systems in order that mercy might be accomplished for all. We may be—in fact I can promise you that we are--called to serve those whom existing power structures, the big “C” Church included, have relegated to the margins.

To be faithful, we don't have to be anyone other than who we are, known and beloved by God. Jeremiah was a young person. Kaddie is a young adult. The people of La Chambon were bakers and housewives and famers. Some of them did nothing more than keep their mouths shut, and not expose the rescue operation. I was just someone who had a commitment to become a trustworthy ally by being willing to show up where I was needed and leverage the privilege I had.

Whether in a small or large way, we are all called to pray with our eyes open and see the world around us. And then we are called to enact liberating love. Most of us are not called to greatness, but we are called to fullness.

You and I and Pastor Nick and the whole of the MC are new partners. I look forward to the journey ahead where we each and all learn how God is calling us at *this* time to live out the love we profess, as we know it through our brother Jesus the Christ.

Thanks be to God! Amen.