

**WILLETTON UNITING CHURCH  
WHERE LOVE AND HOPE MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**LOVE NEVER ENDS  
February 2, 2025  
(4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany)**

**READINGS<sup>1</sup>**

***Jeremiah 1:4-10***

*Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,  
“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”  
Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak,  
for I am only a boy.”*

*But the Lord said to me,  
“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy,’  
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you.  
Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”*

*Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth,  
and the Lord said to me,  
“Now I have put my words in your mouth.  
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant.”*

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<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

### **1 Corinthians 13**

*If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.*

*For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.*

## REFLECTION

(Rev. Toby Keva)

One of my favourite big-budgeted movies is Kingdom of Heaven, directed by Ridley Scott (the same director who gave us the all-time classic, Gladiator).



The movie tells a fictional story of mediaeval knights and kings, lords and princes during one chaotic period of the Crusade in Europe and the Middle East.

In one scene, a commoner named Balian is knighted by his own father, Godfrey, a warlord who is dying from a battle wound. Godfrey knights his own son by saying these words to Balian,

“Be without fear in the face of your enemies.  
Be brave and upright that God may love thee.  
Speak the truth always, even if it leads to your death.  
Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong.  
That is your oath.”

Godfrey then slaps Balian’s face with the back of his hand—with as much strength that he can muster—and says, “And that so you remember it!”

Now, while the movie is largely a fictional work, it is still based on historical records; and, apparently, slapping was a common practice during a knighthood ceremony then!

When I read the reading that we have today from the book of Jeremiah, I was reminded about this scene in the Kingdom of Heaven movie. Here, we hear how God anointed Jeremiah to become a prophet, similar to how Godfrey anointed Balian to become a knight.

In our reading, we also hear how God touched Jeremiah’s mouth after God charged him with the prophetic tasks. But we would be wrong to imagine that it was a gentle touch. The Hebrew word translated as ‘to touch’ in this passage can also mean ‘to strike’ or even ‘to harm’!<sup>2</sup> So, it was possible that God actually slapped Jeremiah’s mouth after God anointed him as a prophet, just like in a knighthood ceremony in the medieval period!

The ‘slap’, however, was not only a gimmick. It had an important meaning. God wasn’t hiding the nature of Jeremiah’s calling. Jeremiah was called to do a very difficult and dangerous task, and the slap, I believe, was a ‘foretaste’ of what Jeremiah would face.

Let’s hear again the words that God said to Jeremiah:

“See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant.”  
(Jeremiah 1:10 NRSV)

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<sup>2</sup> Anatheia Portier-Young, *Commentary on Jeremiah 1:4-10* in Working Preacher from Luther Seminary 29/1/2025, 6:07 pm, Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (Year C).

So, there are six things that Jeremiah had to do: to pluck up, to pull down, to destroy, to overthrow, to build, and to plant; and, of all the six, there are only two that are encouraging: to build and to plant. The rest involve some kind of dismantling and destroying. It is obvious that God sent Jeremiah not to bring peace, but to face conflicts!

No wonder that Jeremiah first responded to God's calling by making an excuse. He said that he was still too young for the role. But Jeremiah was not alone. As a matter of fact, he joined the likes of Moses who also gave an excuse when God asked him to go to Pharaoh.<sup>3</sup>

But God's assurance preceded Jeremiahs' refusal. Before Jeremiah even rejected the calling, God had anticipated his refusal by saying to him:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

(Jeremiah 4:5 NRSV)

In some Christian communities in India, the call into full-time ministry is not only an individual decision; it involves the entire family. Parents, who believe their children have been called into full-time ministry, will actively set their children apart for the role.

When these children have become adults and finally fulfill their parents' hope of them becoming Ministers, the parents will continue with their support. When their children are facing hardship in ministry, their mothers will encourage them by saying these words from Jeremiah:

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.”

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<sup>3</sup> “But Moses said to the Lord, ‘O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.’ (Exodus 4:10 NRSV)

In other words, the mothers are saying to their adult children, “You were set apart, and God will get you through this hardship too.”<sup>4</sup>

Friends, these mothers to their children are like who God was to Jeremiah. It may not be explicitly mentioned in our reading, but love—God’s love—was the driving force behind God’s calling on Jeremiah. It was God’s love for the people of Israel that prompted God to send Jeremiah as a prophet to them so that they would return to following God’s way; and it was God’s love for Jeremiah that compelled God to never leave Jeremiah alone, just like those Indian mothers who never leave their adult children alone in their ministry.

That what love is. Love is the driving force that pushes us through all kinds of difficulties that we face in life. Love was the power that gave a father, who just migrated from India, the courage to jump onto the track of an oncoming train in Sydney to rescue his twin daughters, killing himself in the process.

Indeed, it was also love—the love that Jeremiah had for his people—that gave him the courage to accept God’s calling to serve his people; and it was love—the love that God had for Jeremiah—that would empower Jeremiah to continue in his calling through thick and thin.

No wonder that, in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:7 NRSV) This chapter in Corinthians is often called the ‘wedding text’ because it is the ‘go-to’ Bible reading in a wedding.

But the original context of the letter was not a wedding. Paul was not addressing a bride and a bridegroom in his letter; he was addressing the disunity in the Corinthian congregation that he founded. Paul reminded them that love—their love for one another—was the driving force that would heal the betrayal and the animosity and the hurt so that they could keep the unity

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Chukka, *Commentary on Jeremiah 1:4-10* in Working Preacher from Luther Seminary 28/1/2025, 6:43 pm, Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

amongst themselves. Someone who loves is patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, is not irritable, keeps no record of wrongs, does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.<sup>5</sup>

To maintain unity—in a communal setting or in a matrimonial setting—is hard. Yet, love is the force that can get us through.

I think this reading from the Corinthians complements our reading from Jeremiah. Love must be the reason for someone with great prophetic gift like Jeremiah to do his work, otherwise he would become nothing.<sup>6</sup> Even when someone like Jeremiah risked his life for his calling, without love, he would gain nothing.<sup>7</sup> Like Paul says, prophecies and knowledge will end, but love never ends; prophecies and knowledge are only partial; they only lead to the complete, which is love.<sup>8</sup>

Friends, it has often been said that love is not a noun or an adjective, but a verb. Love is not something that we feel, but it is something that we do.

I think love is both. Love is the reason that compels us to seek for the well-being of the one we love. Love is the place where we start, and love is the means that will carry us through to the destination.

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-6 NRSV)

<sup>6</sup> “And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:2 NRSV)

<sup>7</sup> “If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:3 NRSV)

<sup>8</sup> “Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10 NRSV)