

"I Shall Not Be Moved"

31.Jan.10

Jeremiah 1:4-10

(Also the Elder/Deacon Installation)

A spokesperson on television promoting a product...

"Ladies and gentlemen...after a long game of tennis, or a tough week at work, or yesterday's early morning jog...the last thing you probably need is '*Regular Christianity*.' I mean, just look at all the requirements. And what about those incredible things you're supposed *to do* and supposed *to be* and supposed to *stand up for*? Way too much? I mean, who could actually do and be all that! Right?

"Well, if you're like me you go more for the 'lite' stuff. It's more your style: easy, refreshing, effervescent. That's why I'm excited to tell you about this [*hold up the jar*] '*Christianity Lite*.' This hot-selling product comes with NutraSweet, reduced trans-fat, and reduced trans-faith.

"It offers the same promises and the same appearances as the '*Regular Christianity*' product also currently on the market. Yet '*Christianity Lite*' has only 1/5 the calories and 1/10 the commitment of '*Regular Christianity*.'

"AND.... Ladies and Gentlemen... you don't have to stand for hardly anything except enjoy the non-filling goodness of the lite, refreshing flavor. With this product you will not have to concern yourself with that sometimes heavy aroma and the slightly tangy after-taste of '*Regular Christianity*.'

"No sir-re-e-e-e! Not with this fast-selling '*Christianity Lite*.' It will ease your congestion, calm your nerves, and even help alleviate those tight muscles you get when you spend too much time on your knees. So, if you like being a Christian, but you find the dosages in '*Regular Christianity*' too strong, then lite 'n-up! Come over to the lite side.

"Join the growing numbers of folks just like you who seek something lighter, with many of the same benefits. Come on over to '*Christianity Lite*.' It's new! It's refreshing! It hits the spot!

"Available now at a local church dispensary near you. Visa, Discover, and Master Card accepted. No cash or pledges necessary."

About six hundred years earlier than the writings of Jeremiah, as recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, at one point in time the Israelites find themselves at Mount Sinai. They are terrified by God's fire-y presence and actually afraid of dying at the sound of God's voice. So they ask God for prophets to protect them and speak God's words *for* God in somewhat reasonable safety! So God gives the Israelites prophets. Among them is Jeremiah, as we just heard.

Jeremiah is chosen to be God's ambassador, to help lead the people in God's way. But first he tries to back out, saying, "I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy" (1:6). God won't hear of it and answers, "Jeremiah...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...for I am with you..." (1:7-8). Then God miraculously puts God's words in Jeremiah's mouth and finally appoints him "...to go forth...to build...and to plant" (vv. 9-10). Jeremiah is to station himself as God's worker and not let himself be moved. (Sidebar: The sense of the phrase of God putting God's words in Jeremiah's mouth is not a gentle sense. The sense means, in today's language, more to "thrust" or to "slam.")

We also have the story of a man named Shammah; a special soldier in King David's army. The story of Shammah gives us what I call "stand-your-ground leadership."

Read 2 Samuel 23:11-12

We learn just a bit earlier in this chapter that Shammah was chosen as one of three soldiers to guard David closely; also known as "David's warriors." One day, in a field ripe with lentils, Shammah and the Israelite soldiers were confronted by a battle-hungry legion of the Philistine army. The Israelites regrettably ran away. But Shammah himself stood firm, single-handedly defending himself and the land. One writer put it in these words, "Shammah [was] the type of fellow

who looked at the enemy and said, 'I came here to pick peas and whip Philistines. And I'm done pickin' peas.'"

We know not what the soldiers were doing in that field. We *do* know they were confronted by a powerful Philistine army. Scripture tells us Shammah "took his stand." In ancient Hebrew the sense of this phrase is to station one's self somewhere; to *plant* one's self in a particular place.

The Bible repeatedly has God telling the people to be strong, stand firm, hold your ground. Just before the Israelites enter the Promised Land, God says to Joshua, "...be strong and very courageous...do not turn [from God's way] to the right hand or to the left...do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (*from Joshua 1:7-9*). St. Paul says it over and over again in his letters: (1) "do not become proud, but stand in the Lord" [*Rom 11:20*], (2) "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong" [*1 Cor. 16:13*], (3) "...be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power" [*Eph 6:10-11*], and (4) "...stand firm and hold fast..." [*2 Thess 2:15*]. (See also *Phil 4:1*; *1 Cor. 15:1-2*; *Gal 5:1*; *1 Thess 3:8*; *Phil 4:1*; and Jesus' words *Jn 16:33*.)

There is a term finding more and more usage in current writings on church development and church transformation: "follower-ship." Just as "good leaders" are important, so are "good followers." The idea is that it is a two-sided coin: "leadership" on one side, "follower-ship" on the other. We all know people do not just follow anyone (or at least many people do not do this). For example, I cannot just say "I am your leader. Follow me" and expect you to do so out of the goodness and benevolence of your heart. Good leaders have to give others a *reason* to follow. You follow someone you trust; someone in whom you believe; someone you appreciate; someone who also supports you.

Moses was a good leader because people trusted him, believed in him, saw him as God's chosen and probably because he "stood firm" in the LORD. The same with Joshua. The same with Job, who would not let himself be moved away from God. The same with God's prophets. Even the same as to why you and I follow Christ. So Memorial's church leaders are called by God to lead this

congregation in faithfulness, honesty, trustworthiness, and steadfastness; standing God's ground, holding fast, and not letting themselves be moved...just as the prophet Jeremiah did and just as Shammah, David's soldier, did.

To the leaders we dedicated today and those you voted into office in November, I say, "Just as God gave Jeremiah to the people, and just as God gave Shammah to King David, so God has given you to this congregation, to love us, encourage us, stand firm with and for us, lead us, and help us create our future...not our past. All of this requires that you, as leaders, not let yourself be moved but stand firm in the faith.

God says to each of you, "I have made you a leader...and I am with you." (Ref. Jer 1:8) "...to build and to plant" (Ref. Jer. 1:10).

Both King David's soldier, Shammah, and God's prophet, Jeremiah stood firm, looked the challenge(s) in the face, and held their ground! And I close with a charge to all of us; words from St. Paul at the end of his first letter to the Christians in Corinth....

**"Keep alert, stand firm in your faith,
be courageous, be strong..."**

(from 1 Cor. 16:13-14)

(On standing firm, also see 1 Cor 10; 1 Peter 5:8f; Gal 5:1; 2 Thess 2:15; Eph 6:11, 13.)