



**Opening verse:** Psalm 25v1 “In you O Lord I put my trust”

**Hymn:** To you, O Lord I lift up my soul (*Graham Kendrick*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQgZAg8QwX4>

To you, O Lord I lift up my soul,  
in you I trust, O my God.  
Do not let me be put to shame,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.

Show me your ways and teach me your paths,  
guide me in truth, lead me on;  
for you're my God, you are my Saviour,  
my hope is in you each moment of the day.  
*Chorus*

*No-one whose hope is in you  
will ever be put to shame;  
that's why my eyes are on you, O Lord.  
Surround me, defend me,  
O how I need you.  
To you I lift up my soul,  
to you I lift up my soul.*

Remember, Lord, your mercy and love  
that ever flow from of old.  
Remember not the sins of my youth  
or my rebellious ways.  
According to your love, remember me,  
according to your love,  
for you are good, O Lord.  
*Chorus*

**Readings** Jeremiah 1:4-10 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

**Hymn:** Have you heard God's voice? (STF 662) (*Jacqueline G. Jones*) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtzpZ\\_2n31Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtzpZ_2n31Y)

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?  
Are you still prepared to follow?  
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
though the way be rough and narrow?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?  
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,  
will you share your faith with the faithless?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow?  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
and believe it could be different?  
Will you share your views using words of grace?  
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down  
when the multitudes are silent?  
Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
when the crowds are turning violent?

*We will walk the path that will cost us much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow.  
We will trust in One who entrusts to us  
the disciples of tomorrow.*

**Message:**

**How do you measure success?** For many it is achieving the goals we have been set or set ourselves. In the business world that might well be reaching targets, even in the NHS it is all too often measured by achieving, or missing targets – waiting times in A&E, or for outpatient appointments, or for elective surgery. On a personal level, bringing up a family, having a warm and comfortable home, having a circle of friends, being valued and respected at work. A successful person is financially and emotionally secure, surrounded by people who look up to them, whose achievements are acknowledged. They know who they are and where they are going and stride confidently toward their goals. This sounds more like an '80s motivational speech than a sermon!

What about a successful preacher? Someone who attracts large congregations, someone who is articulate and well educated, someone with a large amount of knowledge? How do we measure the success of a preacher? Paul says, that we can be all these things, and yet just be a “clanging cymbal” or to use a more modern term, “it’s all hot air”, if we do not have love. All that we do and say is worth nothing if not done in love.

At times I suffer from what is known as “imposter syndrome”, where I feel my position is not deserved, or that my skills do not match my responsibilities. As a preacher, I’m possibly not alone, when preparing a Service and the sermon, I often wonder what words should I use, what message do I need to bring, what authority do I have to speak? When faced with a bible passage, what is it that God wants me to say? There’s often a tension between a difficult truth and what people want to hear. How do we bring difficult messages? How do we know if we have understood God’s word correctly?

Jeremiah was one of several Old Testament prophets who on the surface appeared least qualified to be a spokesperson for God. Moses was tongue-tied and a fugitive from justice, Jonah was a coward always running away, David was a simple shepherd boy; and here was Jeremiah. He was what we might term, a sensitive young man, shy and retiring. He loved poetry, a young man who believed he lacked the ability to speak in public.

How many of us identify with that fear of speaking in public? Yet God called Jeremiah. **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”** God had a purpose for Jeremiah. Yet this was no easy task. Jeremiah lived around 600BC, a time of great upheaval for the Jewish people. Jeremiah’s task was to prophesy to the people of Judah and in particular to Jerusalem that if they failed to turn back to God they would face 70 years exile in Babylon, the return to and then the fall of Jerusalem and consequent exile into Egypt.

So was Jeremiah a success? He was completely alone. He lived for 40 years as God’s spokesman, and nobody listened. He consistently and passionately urged people to change their ways, and nobody moved. He had no material success. He was poor and suffered severe personal deprivation. He was imprisoned, put in a cistern, and taken into exile. He was rejected by family and friends, kings and false priests. He often felt discouraged and perhaps bitter. We sometimes use the phrase of “being a Jeremiah”, meaning being a prophet of doom, or being pessimistic about the present and foreseeing a calamitous future. I think that’s rather unfair on Jeremiah. His message was simple – repent and turn to God or be punished. It was a message given to him by God, and the people refused to listen, the same message given by other prophets including Job, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Amos.

In God’s eyes, Jeremiah was one of the most successful prophets. Why? He was obedient and faithful throughout his life, despite his own lack of self confidence of whether he was doing the right thing. He had no outward measure of success, in fact he had to watch the destruction of Jerusalem and experience first hand the exile of a stubborn nation into exile.

So who should, and how do we speak those difficult truths in today’s world? Jeremiah wanted to use his inexperience and his youth as an excuse, but God had other plans. There are young people today who speak difficult truths and we would be wise to listen.

Malala Yousafzai campaigned for the rights of girls to an education in Pakistan, winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Greta Thunberg, at 15 started a school strike for climate change that has made world leaders sit up and take notice. Marcus Rashford at 24 continues to campaign against food poverty in the UK. It has not been easy for these young people. Malala was shot in the head, and suffered life changing injuries. Greta and Marcus have had to face criticism from the press and social media. Yet think about it, all that they have done has been through love – for the girls of Pakistan, for the climate and for those who go hungry.

God does not promise to take away the problems, he promises to be with us, to walk with alongside us as we face those problems. **“You must go everywhere I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.”** God doesn’t promise to remove the difficulties along the way, rather to rescue us from them.

I was reminded of a Thought for the Day that Margaret Gooderham brought us on Jan 5<sup>th</sup> about a man pushing a rock for years with no apparent movement, no success. However when he questioned God it was pointed out to him that as a result of all his effort he had become stronger. His muscles had developed and his arms and legs were strong. His abilities far surpassed what they had been before.

Sometimes we might think we are pushing against an immovable object, we wonder if we are doing any good at all. We don't see any signs of success. Jeremiah wondered for 40 years!

So how do we measure success? God doesn't just want eloquent speakers or fancy entertainers. God wants a willingness and a spiritual sensitivity and alertness. God wants faithfulness and obedience in declaring his word, and we are assured of his help in doing so. Whatever our age, whatever our qualifications, let us follow Jeremiah's example and be faithful and obedient to God's calling to us. Let us commit ourselves to being successful in God's eyes.

**Prayer:** "Listen to the silence"

Psalm 46 v1 "Be still and know that I am God" As you read this, make yourself comfortable, sit silently in the stillness, relax and focus on your breathing – in slowly,.... out slowly..... Imagine the bright blue sky, the sun warming your skin. Sink back and let your mind empty, feel your body relax and become light. Be aware of the stillness and the silence. Spend as long as you want in that stillness and that silence.

Now listen for that soft voice, speaking your name, quietly in your ear. God is speaking to **you**. What is he saying? His message is just for **you**. Listen to that voice.....

Loving Father we thank you that you speak to us in the silence, we pray for those too busy to hear, for those whose pain and suffering prevents them from being able to listen. Forgive us when we do not take time to be with you, when we feel you are not there. Help us to know that you are with us in our joys and our sorrows, in the good times and the bad, and that if we would only listen we would hear your words of grace – your sins are forgiven.

So often we make excuses, I'm too young, too old, too busy, too tired, too inexperienced. Yet you call us, you have a plan and a purpose for each one of us. Help us to listen, help us to hear and may we respond with a willingness to be faithful and obedient for all that you would have us do. AMEN

**Hymn:** I cannot tell why he whom angels worship (StF 350)

*William Young Fullerton (1857-1932)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDEgli4aQDo>

I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,  
should set his love upon us, now or then,  
or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,  
to bring them back, they know not how or when.  
But this I know, that he was born of Mary  
when Bethlehem's manger was his only home,  
and that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,  
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,  
how he will claim his earthly heritage,  
how satisfy the needs and aspirations  
of east and west, of sinner and of sage.  
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,  
and he shall reap the harvest he has sown,  
and some glad day his sun shall shine in splendour,  
when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,  
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,  
or how his heart upon the cross was broken,  
the crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.  
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,  
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,  
and lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,  
for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,  
when at his bidding every storm is stilled,  
or who can say how great the jubilation  
when every human heart with love is filled.  
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,  
and myriad, myriad human voices sing,  
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:  
'at last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!'

**Blessing:**

God of love, help us to speak out, to share your word and show your love. Help us to be a voice for the voiceless. Help us to be silent, to listen – to you and to those who most need to be heard. Let it be so. AMEN.