

**The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
August 15, 2010  
St. John's Episcopal Church  
Jamaica Plain, MA  
The Reverend Julia Dunbar**

**Jeremiah 23:23-29  
Psalm 82  
Hebrews 11:29-12:2  
Luke 12:49-56**

**In you, Oh Lord, I have taken refuge;  
Let me never be put to shame  
For you are my strength & my redeemer.**

**Good Morning,**

**We have been living in the liturgical season of Pentecost for months now. This time is often referred to as “ordinary time” although there is nothing ordinary about it. Pentecost is a time of explanation, a time of gradual but astounding revelation.**

**Many of the readings leading up to today, try to explain the vastness and depth of the gift we have been given through Jesus' life journey, his death and resurrection. Parts of today's readings however seem kind of snarly. Certainly we can glean wisdom from these scriptures, but they don't lend themselves to comfort. In fact, while working on this sermon, I was completely puzzled as to why I chose this lectionary option. The truth is, I chose it in haste and so we must all live with the consequences of my doing.**

**The other lectionary option for today, included the Magnificat – Mary's expression of complete faith and joy at being the appointment mother of Jesus and of her love filled reunion with Elizabeth who was also miraculously pregnant – with John the Baptist.**

**Our first reading from Jeremiah is filled with frustration and rage. According to Hebrew scripture, when Jeremiah was just a boy, God said to him, “before you were born I consecrated YOU and I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” Like all good prophets, Jeremiah protested and reminded God that he was just a boy and that really wanted to be let off the hook. Then God reached out his hand and touch Jeremiah's mouth and said, “Now I have put my words in your mouth.” Who could possibly back away from that encounter?**

**Jeremiah was the prophet who was most active in the tragic period of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. He prophesized in brutal times during the reigns of 6 kings. He was a prophet of unavoidable disaster, kicked out of his own village and in despite his faithfulness was viewed as a traitor.**

**He lived through wars, drought, famine & captivity – all in faithfulness to his God. It is this context of his life, that Jeremiah lashes out and shouts to all who can hear him – “God is sick and tired of your games, people! Some of you walk around proclaiming falsely that you are speaking on God’s behalf. That you are a true prophet. You seek to make yourselves icons & idols, tricking your selves and those who listen to you into thinking YOU are the ONE with the answers. You would be satisfied if people followed and revered and remembered YOU instead of God.”**

**My own mind conjures up images of Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh – of talking heads who come from all sides to inflame hostility against others. Blasphemy! Humanity suffers from the lashes of mean spiritedness. We can all get hung up within ourselves and can easily stray far from the God who says, “speak my word faithfully.” “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no others before me.”**

**The Psalm also hands us a clear, no frills message. “This is exactly what you must do. You must GIVE justice and the weak, the orphan, the destitute, those who are considered lowly in your society.**

**Okay, so how do we do that? How do we choose to live our lives in the service of what is good?”**

**“Love one another” is the tallest order Jesus ever gave. You know what I am talking about. Not crushes, not romance-I’m talking about the kind of love that Jesus died for. I’m talking about giving up power trips and posturing. I’m talking about a love commitment that goes straight from the heart of God to our neighbors, patients, families, colleagues and your church community- to everyone we encounter beyond these walls. I’m talking about love that moves us from being simply polite to truly real. This doesn’t happen without the struggle of making through our own resistance. Resistance to our true selves, resistance to people who may seem so different from you or me that we are inclined to avoid them at all cost.**

**Maybe they bring out discomfort in us, maybe they are self absorbed, maybe we don’t like the way they look, or smell, maybe they just annoy us, maybe we think we’re better than they are. I’m talking about a love where God is our reference point.**

**We are the cloud of witnesses referred to in the epistle. “Let us lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and let us run together and with perseverance the road that is set before us.”**

**We are the ones Luke is talking to when he tells of God’s admonishment – that while we can casually determine the weather based on what the sky looks like, which way the wind is blowing and from what direction –much more is required for us to see what is happening right in front of us. Much more is required for us to be awake and aware enough to realize what is going on in this complicated world and in our own multi-dimensional lives.**

**We can be swept away by distraction and leave precious moments unrealized. We can be such slaves to our work that we forget we have the gift of liberation. We can hide in the shadows of our doubts and fear and forget that we know how to sing and shout and loudly proclaim our reflection of God's eternal love for each and every one of us.**

**In the name of all that is good and holy, let us pay attention to the way the winds are blowing so that we may better interpret the present time.**

**In the name of justice, let us say**

**Amen**