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Proper C16
Jeremiah 1:4-10, Luke 13:10-17

The Gift Not Good Enough

A gift is a wonderful thing, but it can be complicated too. More goes into a gift than meets the eye: How did it come to be? Where is it from? Who is it for? What does it mean? That last one can be tricky, because it touches on the difficulty or ease, the point or the purpose of giving. But there's more! For as complex as the act of giving is, so is the act of receiving. Sometimes a gift is appreciated or treasured. Other times it is misunderstood, maybe not even received.

The question of giving and receiving is at the heart of today's lessons from Jeremiah and Luke. The young Jeremiah feels utterly unable to meet the challenge before him. His confidence fails him. In his heart of hearts he hears: *you are NOT talented enough, smart enough, GOOD enough*. It is that corrosive, powerful little voice we have ALL heard at one time or another: *what good am I?* To which the Spirit of God answers Jeremiah directly: DON'T SAY THAT ! God has purposes for you and your life and will give you the strength and power to accomplish them. Scripture is rarely so direct as it is in Jeremiah's crisis of confidence.

Luke's passage is, in a sense, the opposite side of gift giving: receiving. Here we have a story of a woman whose spirit was so oppressed (the story calls it a CRIPPLING spirit), that she was physically ill for many years. Luke's Jesus is a healer - the Divine Physician; and so Jesus takes the initiative to call and speak to her heart, to her crippled spirit, and give her back her own life. But it is all too much, too dramatic,

too unexpected for some folks in the community to receive. The town was not ready for the healing GIFT, that Jesus offered. They were used to the woman known as 'the bent woman.' They were not ready to accept the healing right in front of them. It reminds me just how problematic gifts can be. There are always reasons to turn them down, especially if the gift might just change us.

Many years ago, on my first visit to San Francisco, I remember walking around the city trying to get acquainted with the place. On the corner outside Old St. Mary's sat a homeless man: David. I know this because among his belongings he had a sign that read: *Hi, I'm David. I'm homeless and have HIV. Can you help?* Now, sadly, this is not at all an unusual sight in America, then or now; but as I stood reading a nearby historical plaque, I watched this scene unfold: Three young tourists arrived at David's corner. They were the same age and skin color as David. They stopped, read his sign and dropped a few dollars in his bucket. Then they turned around and began a conversation among themselves. Taking out their map of the city, they tried to figure out how to get to their next destination. David saw this and overheard their conversation about being lost, and he spoke up: *I know the city real well – where do you want to go? ...* The three tourists continued their conversation without skipping a beat. They did not acknowledge David's offer, nor even turn when he spoke to them. I guess they believed they had nothing to learn from David, nothing he could give them, even if it was EXACTLY what they needed. Now, if they had ignored him from the start, if they had not stopped to read his sign and not given him some cash, this scene would have made more sense to me. BUT REMEMBER, they DID stop, they DID respond. They gave a gift. What they were unable to do was to receive help from David. His knowledge, HIS GIFT, had no place in their lives. It was a gift they were completely at a loss to receive.

... *I know the city real well – where do you want to go?* David's offer still echoes in my memory. His gift was unbidden and un-received.

In late August 1963, the *March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom* took place. It was the occasion of Dr. Martin Luther King's famous *I Have A Dream* speech. Some could say that our country was not ready, and did not receive the great gifts that Dr. King was called and empowered to offer. Some did receive his gift and vision. But I am sure that he had his own Jeremiah moments: Lord, not me, I am only one small person. Certainly he had those moments, like Jesus the Physician, when his gift was refused, mocked or returned.

From the anonymous millions who live on the street, to the remarkable few who speak for an entire generation, there is not a person among us who is not called, and who would not be empowered by God, to a generous and life-giving purpose. What can you give that you don't feel confident about giving? What gift has someone tried to give you that you have been unable to receive? Let Christ speak a word of healing to that crippling little spirit that tells you it is NOT GOOD ENOUGH. Let Christ speak a word of healing to that crippling little voice that tells you that you don't need the gift someone is offering you. Your life, and our world, may just depend upon it!