

An Act of God
Jeremiah 1:4-10
January 27, 2013

The word of the Lord came to me, saying, "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." "Ah, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone 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," declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

What comes to mind when you hear the term "Act of God"? When I worked for the railroad, there was a *force majeure* clause, that is, an act of God clause, in our contracts that allowed the railroad relief from certain contractual obligations when there was a catastrophic occurrence; a flood, a hurricane, a tornado, a severe snow storm, and the like. Many insurance policies have "act of God" clauses which deny payment for losses due to certain disasters.

Modern language usages tend to use the words *force majeure* or act of God for cataclysmic, negative events. Is that what those words make you think of? I must admit, before I began to think about writing this sermon, that's what came to my mind – an act of God equals something dreadful. Now nowhere in today's readings do you see the words "act of God" and there is no account of some disastrous event. But as I read these passages, I began to reshape the way I understand an act of God.

In the first place, God is not in the business of doing things that bring harm to people. God's business is love. God's business is caring more for the people he created than he cares for himself. Like General Electric, God's business brings good things to life. As Paul writes to the Christians in Rome: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* (Rom 8:28 NIV).

When we are confronted with things the world calls "acts of God," we should be quick to point out that these are not acts of God, but acts of Sin. We live in a world that is tainted by sin and the bad things that happen are the result of the world's sinful condition. There are also times when the bad things are the result of the sinful condition of mankind.

Now, if the world has the wrong definition of the term "act of God," how would we go about arriving at a proper definition? To that end, we're going to look at today's readings. Let's consider the Gospel reading.

When the text begins, Jesus has just finished telling the people that he is the promised messiah by telling them that Isaiah's prophecy was about him. The people become irate. They take Jesus outside with the intention of pushing him off a cliff. What does

Jesus do? He walks right through the crowd and leaves. His would-be assailants are helpless to stop him as he just walks right past them.

Now, that is an act of God. Not only that, but changing water into wine; healing the lame, the blind, and the sick; bringing a young girl and two men from death to life. Each of these is an undeniable act of God. Only God can circumvent nature, the evil intentions of men, and even death itself.

That's one kind of act of God. It's the kind that most people like to hear about. We like hearing that our God is not only all-powerful but also all-loving. And it's important that we keep these attributes of God in mind as we look at the next two types of acts of God. It's important to remember that, when God deals with us, he always acts out of his love for us.

The second act of God in today's reading comes from the Old Testament. Jeremiah had no plans on being a prophet. He was the son of a priest, but we have nothing to suggest that he had any plans on entering the priesthood. What we do know is while he was still somewhat young, God called him into special service.

Well, that was the first Jeremiah knew about it. But in reality, God called Jeremiah into his special service a long time before Jeremiah was born, a very long time before he was born. Calling people to himself is another act of God. Only God can call people to himself. We can't go to him. Again, from Paul's letter to the Romans: *the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God* (Rom 8:7).

God calls people to himself as an act that only he can do. In Jesus own words: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him* (John 6:44). So all those who have been drawn to Christ have been drawn to him as an act of God. We can see that clearly in the calling of Jeremiah. We can also see that in the calling of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jonah, all of the disciples including the most spectacular calling of Paul. These are people were called by an act of God and, because of that, their names have been written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Their names will be remembered throughout all eternity.

There is another important facet of this act of God. Look at the people sitting around you. Take a good look at them. Do you know who they are? I don't mean, do you know their names. I mean, do you really understand who they are? The people sitting around you are not just ordinary people. They are very special people. They are people who have been personally called to Christ by an act of God.

Do you want to know something even better than that? Some of these special, called people were looking at you. That's right, you are the recipient of an act of God. You have been personally called to Christ. Just like Jeremiah, Abraham, and Jonah you belong to Christ because of an act of God. Just like Moses, Isaiah, and all the apostles, your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, your name will be remembered throughout all eternity.

Now, let's turn our attention to the acts of God in today's Epistle reading. There are at least three here. Paul says that we are all members of the body of Christ. That's the act of God we just talked about from Jeremiah. Paul also says that we have received gifts from God. Each of us has received one or more gifts as an act of God. These gifts come in a variety of forms; teaching, healing, helping, administration, and so on. In other places, Paul talks about gifts of giving, serving, and preaching. And receiving these gifts is only the first half of this act of God. The other half is using them.

When we use the gifts God has given us to serve both our fellow Christians and unbelievers, we complete this act of God. We actually become the vehicles God uses in the performance of this act. When we, who can teach, teach, it's not us teaching but God teaching through us. When we, who can serve, serve, it's not us serving but God serving through us. Do you get the idea? It's an act of God by which we receive our gifts and it's an act of God by which God uses these gifts through us.

The third act of God in this reading is the act of love. Does that sound strange? If it does, you might be thinking of love as a noun. Love is not a noun. Love is a verb. Love is an action. The act of love is an act of God. Without God's intervention, we are not capable of love.

When sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden, mankind lost its ability to love. Sin and love cannot coexist. In our natural, sinful condition, we cannot receive or give true, selfless love. Sure, the world pulls off different fake loves, artificial loves, imitation loves. The sinful world tries its best to mimic real love but the world's love always fails.

Therefore, the ability to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength can only happen when God acts to put his love in us. The ability to love our neighbors as ourselves can only happen when God acts to have his love flow through us to our neighbors. Our ability to truly love is an act of God.

Now, I want to take just a second to answer a question some of you might have. That question is, "How do I know the love in me is the true love that comes from God?" That's easy. Just take Paul's love test. Is your love patient and kind? Is it humble, gentle, and giving? Does it forgive? Does it protect, trust, hope, and last? If you said yes to these things, then the love in you is an act of God.

Are you beginning to see the term "act of God" in a different light? When God acts, it's always for good, never for evil. When God acts, love flows out in a deluge and drowns the sin of this world. When you witness a true act of God, you witness love in action. How do I know this is true? Simple.

It was an act of God that a plan for salvation existed before the first sin was committed. It was an act of God that prompted Jesus to come to this earth and humble himself to human limitations. It was an act of God that taught the crowds and performed the miracles. It was an act of God that took a cursed cross and turned it into a symbol of

victory. It was an act of God that put tongues of fire on the heads of the apostles and then sent them to spread the Gospel of Christ to the whole world.

And it didn't stop there. It was an act of God that brought you to baptism. It was an act of God that put saving faith in your heart. It was an act of God that wrote your name in the Lamb's Book of Life.

But let's stop speaking in the past tense. It is an act of God that gives you the very breath you breathe. It is an act of God that daily keeps you in the true faith. It is an act of God that blesses you with the opportunity to be here in his presence where his Word is taught in its truth and purity. It is an act of God that not only forgives your sin but also invites you to feast at the table of the Lamb.

And in the future tense, it will be an act of God that will someday take you from the sin and suffering of this world and usher you into the presence of the most holy Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the universe.

My friends in Christ, may our good and gracious Lord always keep our eyes open to see the real acts of God.