

THE CALL

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Most of us don't appreciate other people making decisions about our lives. From our earliest years we resent decisions made for us, decisions made affecting us, decisions made without consulting us, decisions made for us that will affect our entire lives. For example, names are chosen for us before we are born that we have to live with for the rest of our lives. There was a time when professions were chosen for children before they were born. If your father was a blacksmith, you'd be a blacksmith. If your mother was a queen, the burdens of royalty were thrust on you. Parents decide for children when to get up, when to go to bed, what to eat and what not to eat. They often choose what TV programs children may watch as well as countless other choices made for their children. Teenagers have much more freedom but still chafe under choices made for them by their parents, such as when and if they can have the car and how late they can stay out and where they can go and with whom. Teenagers can't wait to become adults when they can make their own decisions. But adults soon learn that we're not exempt from living with choices made for us by others. Employers sometimes give us work to do that we have not chosen nor do we feel competent to accomplishment. Elders are sometimes assigned to committees they have not chosen for themselves and may resent the pastor placing them on one committee rather than another. So we can identify with the prophet Jeremiah in our Old Testament lesson who deeply resented choices made for him by God.

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Like most of us, Jeremiah resisted the heavy, intrusive, meddling hand of the Lord

upon him – choosing for him to be a prophet. Jeremiah responded, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak.” That’s the kind of response you give at Christmas when you receive an article of clothing that you have not chosen nor would even think of buying for yourself, and you smile politely and say, “I don’t know what to say.” You actually know what to say, but it’s impolite to say so you remain quiet. That’s the kind of response Jeremiah gave to the Lord when the Lord informed Jeremiah that he had been chosen to be a prophet. “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak.”

Now let’s be clear what God meant when God said, “I appointed you a prophet.” God was not choosing for Jeremiah a comfortable pastorate with a loving congregation such as I have. God was placing Jeremiah as a loose cannon on a sinking ship of state. Jeremiah lived and prophesied a few years before, during, and right after the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the invading Babylonian army whose actions compare well to Nazi storm troopers in their ferocity and cruelty. Jeremiah’s job, chosen for him by God, chosen for him before he was born, chosen for him without any input from himself – was to warn and threaten and even taunt the people and rulers of Jerusalem that the end was near. God called him to continually denounce their ingratitude, idolatry and apostasy. He was everywhere – in the temple, on street corners, in the borough hall, at the school board meetings always causing trouble, rocking the boat with his insistent, “Thus saith the Lord.” God did not give Jeremiah a message of comfort. Jeremiah was called by God to be the stereotypical prophet of doom and gloom – like the cartoon figure walking around in sack-cloth and a sign proclaiming, “The end is near.” That familiar cartoon figure is based on the real life prophet Jeremiah. God appointed Jeremiah “to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow.” Jeremiah resisted God’s choice for him. Jeremiah resented God calling him to be a prophet.

There is one note of hope, however, in the message God gave Jeremiah to proclaim. At the very end, after plucking up and pulling down, destroying and overthrowing – there is a word of hope, a form of the Old Testament gospel. The Lord says to Jeremiah, *I appointed you... to build up and to plant*. Jeremiah began to lay the foundation of a new people of God in exile in Babylon. Jeremiah taught God's people that they could exist and be great without a temple and without national prestige. All they needed was the promise and the power of the Lord. Sometimes God plucks up and pulls down so that God can do a new thing in our lives and communities. Our church building was burned to the ground twelve years ago but God taught us we could exist and grow and carry out God's mission in exile. And now we have a new building that is so much more useful. And sometimes God plants new thoughts and ideas in our minds – thoughts that we would never entertain if the old thoughts had not been plucked up.

The call of God comes to us as it did to Jeremiah ages ago. God's call comes to us, above all, through Jesus Christ. God calls us to turn to Christ. When a child is baptized or when we receive new members we hear the formal call, "Do you reject sin in your life and evil in the world? Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior? Will you be Christ's faithful disciple until your life's end?" God calls us, first of all, to turn to Christ and trust him. That requires us to pluck up and pull down and destroy and overthrow everything that keeps us from loving God and neighbor with our heart, soul, strength and mind. That's not a sudden, once for all decision – but a lifelong vocation. *It's not always easy to be a Xn.*

God also calls us to serve him wherever we are. We all have a vocation. Vocation comes from the a Latin word meaning to call. All of us are called by God. In Baptism God has called each one of us. He calls us to be farmers, taxi drivers, truck drivers, professors, hairdressers, insurance agents, teachers, and so many more things. *Like Jeremiah, some of us have been called to jobs, professions & work we did not choose. Sometimes unhappy, dis-satisfied, feel unfulfilled*

For some of us, our lives have been shaped by the word from the time we were born -- from before the time when we were born -- when parents prayed for us before we were born and dreamed dreams for us and made plans for us -- set up the nursery, bought presents -- through bible story books and bedtime prayers and Sunday school and church and youth group. But also through reading the newspaper, talking with fellow citizens, participating in volunteer organizations, wrestling with the issues of the day in school room and office -- God has been preparing us, shaping us, molding us. We have all heard God's voice in a prompting of the heart, an ache in the conscience, a call from within yet beyond. A voice from beyond unsettles us, challenges us, shames us, delights us. Respond to that call! Don't silence the voice! Follow the gleam!

Do not say, "I am too young or I am too old or I am middle-aged or I'm just one solitary individual, what good can I do. I'm not smart enough. I'm not popular enough. I'm not good enough. God will be with you. God will be with us -- if we only listen and obey and respond to his call. God says to us what God said to Jeremiah: Do not say, I am too young or too old, etc. Do not be afraid. I am with you to deliver you."

Faithful God, you have appointed us your witnesses, to be light that shines in the world. Let us not hide the bright hope you have given us, but tell everyone your love, revealed in Jesus Christ the Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.