

January 30, 2022
Rev. Kerry Smith

God is Calling, What Did Jeremiah Do?
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Jeremiah 1:4-10

New Revised Standard Version

Now the word of the Lord came to me 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." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

It feels weird to think of being called. It makes me want to look around and ask, "Who, me?" Preacher Frederick Buechner says, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."¹ As Christians we share a belief that God calls all people into ministry and gives each person gifts for that ministry. My hope for these next few weeks as we talk about God calling us is that we will together discover how to listen for and respond to God who is calling us into the world to love and serve others.

Today we hear the story of God calling Jeremiah. Scripture tells us that Jeremiah was young, and it is a reminder for us that God uses everyone to announce God's love and to work with God for God's justice. However, God doesn't focus on Jeremiah's age. God calls Jeremiah because of his heart.

The world Jeremiah was born into was a bit of a disaster. Babylonian troops twice invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the king's palace, destroyed the temple, and deported some of the leading citizens to Babylon. The people had lost loved ones in the sieges and lost their means of livelihood. People lost their government and their religious leadership. For people who left and were now exiles, they lost their homeland as well. There was this violent collapse of their world and it meant that people felt forgotten by God.

Yes, Jeremiah was young when he felt the call of God, but he could see and feel the hopelessness happening to him and to people all around him. Maybe Jeremiah argued with God about his call because he couldn't reconcile his broken world with God's call for him to be a prophet. God came calling and Jeremiah told God to go away because he was too young for this work. He didn't feel prepared for the call that God had placed on his life. When we feel God tugging on our heart, it's okay to share with God how we feel about it. We don't have to pretend we have it all together because speaking truth to power is scary. It's okay to tell God there must be some mistake. I'm not old enough. Or maybe we think we are too old. We don't do public speaking. We're not religious enough. We don't know enough about the Bible. We don't pray enough. We're not prophet material.

God didn't give up. God told Jeremiah, I have called you since before you were born. I consecrated you. I appointed you. I will be with you. Don't be afraid. I will tell you where to go and I will give you the words to say. Jeremiah never gets to the point where he is glad to have been chosen for this work. It's lonely to speak the truth to a broken world. But we can't ignore when we see something that is wrong. Jeremiah tells the people that they had forgotten all the things God had called them to do and to be. God asks Jeremiah to share how upset God is in hopes that the people would get to moving and go about the work of loving God and loving their neighbor.

¹ Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*.

Last week we talked about Jesus' mission to the world when Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah. We remembered the good news of recovery of sight, the release of prisoners, and the deliverance of the oppressed. What does God want to do through you? Karen Stone shared with me this week that since March 2020 she has used a lot of stationery because one of her good friends was at Juliette Fowler and wasn't able to leave. Every day for months Karen sent her friend a card. She even used different stationery because she didn't want it to get boring. Every one of us is called through our baptism. I hope that we can hear God's word of reassurance and promise. God called you since before you were born. God consecrated you for a purpose. God appointed you. God will be with you. Don't be afraid. God will tell you where to go and God will give you words to say.

When I think about calling, I think a good place to start is to ask what breaks God's heart in our community and what are we willing to do about it? What is breaking God's heart in this community and what can Greenland Hills do about it? I worry that we in the church have lost our voice. Next Sunday our Confirmation kids will be joining the church and they will answer this question: "Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?" We have to speak out when something is wrong. We worry that no one wants to hear what we have to say or we don't want to cause a ruckus because we want to get along. God calls us to speak out against hate, against injustice, against oppression.

It's not okay that there is such a disparity in our schools depending on what side of town they are on. We have to speak out to our city's leadership and insist they do something about it. I remember the first time I saw the Rosa Parks memorial in downtown Dallas. Rosa Parks is sitting on a bus seat and behind her are the words, "until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream" attributed to Martin Luther King Jr. but first said in Amos 5:24. "Until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream". I think it is up to us to figure out the irrigation system.

Jeremiah was young, yes, but he also had heart and passion that would not let him keep silent when there was injustice and despair. What breaks God's heart where you live? What are you willing to do about it? When we are afraid, God promises us God's presence and holy courage. One of the pastors I had the great pleasure of working with would talk about holy boldness. Her name was Patsy Brundige and she was this 4'11" white haired woman who had experienced much pain in her life. When she said those words, holy boldness, her voice would get strong and it was like she would be trying to give me some of her courage. Holy boldness. What do you need to have holy boldness about?

The other week I saw the *Hadestown* musical. I didn't know anything about it and it was amazing. One of the lines that they said that has stuck with me is, "to the world we dream about and the one we live in now." What can we do today to make the world we live in right now look more like the world we dream about? If there is anything that we have learned in the last almost two years, it is that our lives are but an instant. We had this opportunity to slow down our lives. We have been given a gift of rediscovering a new priority for time with family and friends. Some of us may have decided we need to move up retirement dates or make sure not to fill the calendar so full with activities. We have seen how important it is to take care of our bodies and our spirit.

I hope that we will emerge from this time with a brand new or a renewed commitment to be a voice and to act for justice. To learn about, talk about, and to act for racial equity. To be a part of a church that is for real inclusivity. Our lives will never be the same, but we can move into the future together as people and as a church family to bear new life. To be a people of hope

reminding ourselves and others that God has called us and God will never let us go. Thanks be to God, Amen.