

God Calls Us to Speak – Jeremiah 1:4 - 10
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Sermon by
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"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" (Jer 1:4).

In the prophetic book of Jeremiah that is noted for its prophetic words, fierce, fiery, and wonderful, the first word is God's.

The prophet's words begin, not with the prophet having something inside him that needs to be expressed but rather with God's word coming to him. This is what Martin Luther referred to as "the external word," a word that is not self-derived, a word that comes as an intrusion, a gift from the outside, from a God who will not leave us in silence.

It is therefore somewhat of a misnomer to speak of this book of the Bible as "The book of Jeremiah," as if this book were mostly a report on the words of a man. It is perhaps better entitled, "The Book of God," because it is God who begins this conversation, and God's words that are the main concern of Jeremiah's words.

In other words, the direction of Jeremiah's life is God's idea before it is Jeremiah's.

The word of the Lord that comes to Jeremiah is not only a gift but also a vocation. Even before he was born Jeremiah had been set aside, commandeered, consecrated for service to the Lord.

In a sense, every word from the Lord is also a call from the Lord.

That's why we study the Gospel so carefully. We really expect God's word to be spoken to us, maybe not every time we read the Bible or every time we gather here in church, but often enough to make our listening to God a very risky undertaking!

Every verse of scripture is lovingly, attentively read by us because every verse is a potential summons from God. Perhaps we ought to read a passage in

the Bible, not asking ourselves, "What do these words mean?" but rather read asking, "What is God summoning me to do through these words?" God speaks a word because God has an assignment for us. Perhaps we ought to listen to every sermon, not asking, "Do I agree with this?" but rather, "How does God expect me to change my life in order to make this sermon make sense?"

What we've got here, in this stunning call of God to young Jeremiah, is something akin to God's work in Genesis 1.

Where there was nothing and from this chaos and darkness, something is brought forth.

How?

All on the basis of the word of God. Here is a God who loves to bring forth light out of darkness, a world out of chaos, and a way out of the wilderness.

"Then (Jeremiah) said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy" (Jer 1:6).

When the young prophet finally speaks, in response to the call of God, Jeremiah's first word is a word of resistance. The one called for divine work immediately senses his limitations for that work. He tries to beg off, listing his inadequacies.

Abraham and Sarah were told they would have a son long after their child bearing years. They asked, "How can this be?"

Moses said that he was not good at public speaking because he was a stutterer.

Mary asked the angel, "How can this be?"

Most people who are called by God are initially confused by that call.

All this is quite typical of the call for divine service, and quite beside the point. It would appear from the stories in scripture of God calling someone, God almost always calls people who are too young, too timid, too old, or too immoral.

Today's story is not about the singular virtues of the one who is being called. Jeremiah was not being modest when he said, "I am only a boy;" he was simply being truthful.

This story is about a risk-taking, bold sort of God who reaches in, summons, and calls people for divine service. When God calls the person is given what they need for that service. Note what God said to Jeremiah, "You shall speak whatever I command you" and "I am with you" (1:7).

Jeremiah need not work alone. God equips and stands beside those whom God calls. This is the sort of God who says, in effect, "I'm getting ready to change the whole world, to revolutionize, to renovate, and to reorient the world - and guess who's going to help me?"

This God tends not to work alone but recruits ordinary men and women for this work.

"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" (Jer 1:10).

Though "only a boy," Jeremiah is put in charge of the downfall and rising of kingdoms, over the task of destroying and creating worlds. That's some power to place in the hands of a young person! What God wants Jeremiah to do is not small.

Furthermore, the renovation of the community is not a painless affair. Something must be plucked up in order for something to be planted. The word that brings new life is also the word that destroys and overthrows. The intrusion of the word of God is not a placid or pleasant affair. Time and again, the community must relearn the potentially disruptive, disconcerting, and even destructive power of the word of the living God.

You will recall that Jesus began his ministry in Luke 4 with a confrontational sermon and an angry congregational response. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim deliverance," Jesus said.

The beginning of the book of Jeremiah implies that God acts and God moves in to make a new future, a new world, by speaking, by giving a word to the world through the prophet. God's standard way of making a new world is through speech (Just like the story of creation in Genesis 1).

Now that we have walked through these verses of Jeremiah, reflecting on some of the significance of Jeremiah's call let's reflect on something else.

Too often we are so busy being Christians, we do not listen to the story of Jeremiah's call with due diligence. We should listen to today's lesson with the expectation. And that expectation is this: we are to apply this story to ourselves.

So this is the sort of sermon that you will need to finish for yourself.

So I leave you with two questions:

1. How is this story of the call of young Jeremiah to be a prophet your story too?
2. How does this story remind you of the story of your call?