

Sermon August 25, 2019 Call of Jeremiah

JEREMIAH 1:4-10; PSALM 71:1-6; HEBREWS 12:18-29; LUKE 13:10-17

I think this call story from the Book of Jeremiah, must have been quite a wonderful thing for the prophet to possess. It must have told him unmistakably that his life had a purpose within God's mission. After all, it says that God *knew* Jeremiah, *before* he formed him in his mothers womb. First he had the purpose (calling the people of Judah back to themselves and back to a true relationship with Himself), then he formed, consecrated, and appointed Jeremiah. Only then was Jeremiah born.

The *clarity* of that purpose rings like a bell. Imagine it. Perhaps you have that clarity about your own life's purpose. Perhaps you know to the very core of your being why you are here and can say so in six beautiful verses like Jeremiah. I do think some of us can. Perhaps it is possible that all of us could *at some point* speak and write with this kind of clarity about the ultimate purpose of our lives, and how it fits in to God's mission in our particular time and place.

I have had the privilege of hearing from some of you about the times when you *knew* that it was God who was speaking to you. It is a delight to hear the sense of clarity and purpose that has given you. Again and again, I notice, those who have that

experience, draw on its memory for strength, for affirmation, to renew a sense of direction, or to *discern* the answer to a question , to make a decision.

I simply don't know, though, whether *all* of us have the kind of clarity that Jeremiah had. Perhaps we do. Or perhaps it is that some do, and the rest of us are able to follow God's will because of the clarity of those prophetic individuals.

In any case, this call experience must have been very sustaining to Jeremiah, and let's face it he would have needed it because he was pretty much an absolute failure during his lifetime. Of course He was able to proclaim with wondrous clarity and stunningly powerful imagery what would happen to the people of Judah if they did not mend their ways. He was able to say exactly how they needed to mend them, where they had gone wrong, and most vividly *the doom* that would befall them if they did not straighten up and fly right. After all, this was God's purpose for his life, he believed, and you have to give him credit. He did stick his neck out and try to tell them, and definitely there were some attempts to heed his rather searing advice. But it all came true.

His prophetic vision of the "boiling pot tilted away from the north," dutifully proclaimed, came woefully to pass. History records it.

After the prophet had been wailing out his jeremiads and lamentations of warning for about 35 years, the Babylonian hordes of Nebuchadnezzar's army finally *did* pour southward upon the city of Jerusalem and carry it away. The Temple was destroyed, her people carried into exile where, 'by the rivers of Babylon, they hung up their harps' as the psalmist sings it.

During those thirty-five years Jeremiah would have *needed* this call story to sustain him, to reassure him that God was on his side and had a purpose for him. As the Lord had warned him he would, he faced every kind of opposition imaginable: attacked by his brothers, beaten and put into stocks, opposed by a false prophet, threatened with death, thrown into a cistern, imprisoned by the king. It is just a reminder that opposition or difficulties are not necessarily signs that we are not doing God's will. Few of the faithful in the Bible had smooth sailing. All faced opposition. They followed their calling anyway. Thank God! Now we know we can follow their example and keep going, keep following Christ, in spite of the difficulties we face.

I guess, in the end, it is the *truth* of Jeremiah's prophecies that has kept them with us for two and a half thousand years and more, and the incredible insights they contain, starting with the call story itself.

Jeremiah is *not* called to speak for God because he is tough, strong, wise, experienced, and good at speaking. Quite the opposite. He is only a boy. He does not know *how* to speak. God calls him where he is weak and vulnerable. Perhaps you have this in common with Jeremiah. If we give some thought to our own experience we may notice that God has called us where we are most broken. We might have tried to explain to God or to yourself that we couldn't possibly do it ... we don't want to ... we can't. We are in good company. It is a theme throughout the call stories of the Bible. Every person called by God for any purpose, says the same. [I would certainly say the same. I couldn't possibly do what God has asked me to do. I'm simply not up to it. But you all know that!]

Same with Jeremiah. He couldn't. But God puts out His hand and touches his mouth. He finds he can. So it has been with you, and with me – with all of us. We can't, but God can.

Jeremiah's most famous passage, is the famous 31:31, which speaks of a new covenant between God and His people. I am sure that when Jeremiah first uttered these words in the sixth century before Christ, they spoke of a future for the Jewish people

and for Judah. I am equally sure they still speaks of a future for us:

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Perhaps it is a similar knowing that sustains us in our path. Perhaps, like Jeremiah we do know our true calling and our true purpose. When we look back, we see how it is that God has *known* us from before we were born, has waited for us, beckoned to, called to us, *sung* to us from a place that is deeper than the centre, closer to us than we are to ourselves. From that we

know that we'll know it again in the future. This is what keeps us going.

When we listen very closely to Him perhaps this is what we shall hear:

⁵ ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you prophets to the nations.’

Of course, even still, we'll say again, as we have before and as Jeremiah did:

‘Ah, Lord God! Truly we do not know how to speak, for we are only children.’

And the Lord may say to us,

‘Do not say, “I am only a child”;
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸ Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,

⁹Then the Lord may put out his hand and touch our mouth; and the Lord may say to us,

‘Now I have put my words in your mouth.

¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms [and neighbourhoods],
to pluck up and to pull down,

to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.'

[In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.]