

Pastor's Message – 8/21/22
Jeremiah 1:4-10

I heard on the news the other day that martial law has been renewed in Ukraine again, 6 months after the war started. It was a reminder to me of news cycles: what is reported for how long. The news that is reported changes, ebbs, and wanes, over time. Somethings, sometimes important things, are pushed to the back burner as new news comes up.

We don't hear much about the coronavirus these days, even though people are still getting sick and dying. We don't hear much about the war in Ukraine these days, even though people are still getting killed. The economy always seems to be in the news, political squabbling always seems to be in the news. The Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* is still on many people's minds.

Vv. 4 & 5 in our Bible reading today are often cited by opponents of legal abortion because it reads as though the prophet Jeremiah was called prior to conception.

*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." (1:4-5)*

The text clearly indicates Jeremiah's existence, preconception, was planned by God, part of God's plan for the salvation of Judah.

In his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Pastor Rick Warren wrote, "Your birth was no mistake or mishap, and your life is no fluke of nature. Your parents may not have planned you, but God did. He was not at all surprised by your birth. In fact, he expected it. Long before you were conceived by your parents, you were conceived in the mind of God." It is an incredible, mind-numbing truth that before we were even born, God knew us.

There is a children's book by Anne Bowen, published in 2006, called *I Loved You Before You Were Born*. It is the story of a loving grandmother who eagerly awaits the arrival of her grandchild. She dreams of the baby's soft sighs, sweet smells, and tiny toes, and imagines the infant smiling, rolling over, and crawling for the first time. With poignancy and thoughtfulness, the story covers the grandmother imagining the child's whole first year of life. Once the baby arrives, Grandma is ready with a very special message: Even before you were born, I was your grandma and I loved you.

The United Methodist Church, although it may sometimes see abortion as the lesser of evils, allows for the existence and practice of abortion in its official position. Our Book of Discipline puts it this way,

*Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion.
But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the
unborn child.*

We recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures by certified medical providers. We support parental, guardian, or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood. We cannot affirm

abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection or eugenics (see Resolution 3184).

Governmental laws and regulations do not provide all the guidance required by the informed Christian conscience. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, family, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel.

We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may cause them to consider abortion. We entrust God to provide guidance, wisdom, and discernment to those facing an unintended pregnancy.

The Bible seems to suggest, and I have said often, that God know us and loves us and names us even before we are born. God knows who we will be and knows the plans he has for each one of us and we need to listen for God's voice calling and directing us.

Here I am waiting once again,
On my knees, listening and then,
In a moment a voice so clear,
Speaks in a whisper
the words I need to hear:

I know the plans I have for you,
You're always on my mind.
And all the thoughts I think toward you
are lovingly designed ...
To bring you through
and give to you
a future and a hope.
They're for your peace,
they're for your good,
The plans I have for you.

I know the plans I have for you,
You're always on my mind.
And all the thoughts I think toward you
are lovingly designed ...
To bring you through
and give to you
a future and a hope.
They're for your peace,
they're for your good,
The plans I have for you.

Oh, there is no one like You!
 Still sometimes I need You to remind me.
 And every time You do,
 you say, "Seek Me.
 You will find Me."

I know the plans I have for you,
 You're always on my mind.
 And all the thoughts I think toward you
 are lovingly designed ...
 To bring you through
 and give to you
 a future and a hope.
 They're for your peace,
 they're for your good,
 The plans I have for you.

To bring you through
 and give to you
 a future and a hope.
 They're for your peace,
 they're for your good,
 The plans I have for you.
 The plans I have for you.

Words and Music by Marty Goetz and Misha Goetz Hoyt
 PLEASE go buy all their stuff!
martygoetz.com
itsmishamusic.com
 ©2018 Singin' in the Reign Music and Misha Goetz Music

We heard in our Bible reading today that Jeremiah is being called to be a prophet — a mouthpiece of God. His call is specific to the way God made him (v. 5) and is intended for the situation in which God has placed him (vv. 7, 10). Every person's call is personal; it's unique to each of us. We aren't supposed to read Jeremiah's calling and do what he was supposed to do. We're supposed to read it and do what *we* are supposed to do.

We aren't all called to be missionaries to Uganda, mothers to autistic children, servants in children's ministry, sufferers of chronic pain or architects bringing the sacredness of beauty to public spheres. God's call is personal to each of us. So, who has he made you to be? And who are you supposed to influence through that?

Most people hunt for jobs. Most people polish up a resume, send out email queries, knock on doors, read online classifieds, and rack up thousands of dollars in student loans just to get an education that will prepare them for a job they don't yet have. Lately, I've been seeing a commercial on television from Indeed which offers help with resumes. But hardly anyone in the Bible ever *volunteered* for God's service. Jeremiah was given a specific job to do.

God's calling revolves first around how he has wired us. Our gifts. Passions. Talents. But this calling then speaks out to others — sharing God values and God's good news to people in our circles of influence.

God calls, but when young Jeremiah cries out, "I am only a boy," we understand and might even agree. But God will have nothing to do with our age limitations. How do we know when we are called, what we are called to, and how long that call lasts? I am reminded of Bob Uecker, who at 88 years old, is still calling baseball games for the Milwaukee Brewers. When asked how long, he has said, "I'll know when it's time. In a rather firm, clear voice the Lord responded to Jeremiah, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy' ... for I am with you to deliver you" (v. 7). God speaks to us in the same way.

For starters, God's voice is best heard in the context of a community of faith (vv. 1-3). Jeremiah was born into the priestly class of Levites (Joshua 21:18). Growing up within a priestly community, Jeremiah would have known the stories about Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and so many others who had heard God's call. He would have been schooled in regular prayer and would have witnessed the people of his village poring over sacred texts to determine God's will and way for their lives. The voice of God thus came to Jeremiah, not out of the blue, but in the context of a community devoted to God; a community where people listened for God's voice together. That's why pastors in the United Methodist Church are first approved by their own church.

God's voice is best heard in conversation with God (vv. 4-8). We don't know exactly how God's call "came" to Jeremiah (v. 4). Perhaps it was a dream. Perhaps it was an inner voice or maybe it was during a time of prayer. But, like Moses and Samuel before him, Jeremiah decides to test the voice by entering into conversation with it, even pushing back against it.

God told Jeremiah that Jeremiah had been appointed to a prophetic mission before he was even born (v. 5). Jeremiah's call, God says, is to be a prophet to the nations, to speak God's word to others and for the benefit of others. *you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you (v. 7c) today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms (v. 10a).*

The Hollanders of Waupun probably know the old, Dutch story about a little boy named Peter who saved all of Holland. Holland floods easily and is protected by flooding by a system of walls known as dikes. According to legend, one day little Peter was walking along one of these walls and noticed a leak. Water was flowing in through a small crack, about the size of his finger. Peter wanted to go and find help, but he knew that, if left unchecked, the water leaking through the dike could weaken the wall until it collapsed. Having nothing with him to stop the leak, Peter put his finger into the hole. He sat there all night, keeping the water inside the dike. In the morning, the townspeople found him. Little Peter, thanks to his quick thinking, saved the whole town. He was just a boy, but his action saved many.

God will always supply the resources we need (vv. 9-10). When we have a deep relationship with God, our conversations lead us to a radical honesty about our shortcomings in comparison to God's glory. Jeremiah recognized that he had a shortfall in experience and ability to speak, but these were not barriers to God. In fact, it seems that God -- to cite a saying -- usually doesn't *call the qualified, but, rather, qualifies the called.* God was the one who put words in the mouth of Jeremiah, and God will be the one who ensures that Jeremiah's mission is a successful one, even if it will cost Jeremiah a lot in the process (vv. 9-10).

Some of the most powerful words in the Bible are the repeated promise of God: "I am with you" (v. 19).

God helps us to move beyond the defeatist four-syllable message "I am only" with a different four-syllable mantra: "I am the one." Only one is enough for God.

- Only one person
- Only one team
- Only one congregation
- Only one family
- Only one town
- Only one state
- Only one nation
- Only one continent
- Only one world.

In God's infinite wisdom, and with God's infinite power, God has chosen you, only you, as the only one who can stand as a particular kind of witness, perform a unique kind of ministry, give a distinct shape to Christ's body here on earth. You are the only one God chooses for this task. Only you can do God's work as only you can do it. Together with every member of the body of Christ, we make up a community of "onlys."

So, our Bible reading for today is not just for each and only one individual, it is also for churches. What is this Church called to be? What gifts and graces has this Church been given? How has God called this Church? God has already created and blest this Church and knows the plans he has for you. God speaks and calls this Church as well.

I know the plans I have for you,
 You're always on my mind.
 And all the thoughts I think toward you
 are lovingly designed ...
 To bring you through
 and give to you
 a future and a hope.
 They're for your peace,
 they're for your good,
 The plans I have for you.