

## **“Did I Hear You Right, Lord?”**

1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Jeremiah 1:4-10

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**Introduction:** Poor Jeremiah! He was called to share a difficult message from God. Can you imagine a prophet having to deliver bad news? What do you think it could have been?

Through Jeremiah, the Lord declared that the covenant was broken and that God would bring upon Israel and Judah the curses of the covenant. Jeremiah was to explain the reason for the impending disaster, the destruction by the Babylonian army and captivity.

“And when your people say, ‘Why has the Lord our God done all these things to us?’ You shall say to them, ‘as you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.’” It’s not surprising that Jeremiah was called the “weeping prophet.”

The Lord called him to live in isolation from the people so that his message wouldn’t become diluted. He was forbidden from turning to people for comfort, marrying or fathering children, going to weddings and funerals, sitting in a house with feasting, or sitting in the company of people having fun.

We know this from his prophecy. In Jeremiah 15:17, he says, “I did not sit in the company of merrymakers.” In Jeremiah 20:10, he says, “my friends are watching for me to stumble.”

But there is a moment toward the end of his ministry where God gives him a positive message. In Jeremiah 29:11 he shares God words: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give a future with hope.”

### **Jeremiah 1:4-10:**

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.”

**Prayer:** Gracious God, speak to us again through the passage of Jeremiah that we might understand our call to be your Word in our community and beyond. In the name of Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

This passage was handed down for us – for you and me. It is not just a recording of Jeremiah's call; it is one of the classic texts on how God calls each of us. In the call of Jeremiah we see that God's call is always personal and specific. It is the beginning of a process, not the end or the final action. God partners with us to give us exactly what we need to follow the call.

One time many years ago when I was working in New York, I told the story of my call. Afterward, a serious woman came up to me and said, "The call you got when you asked God what you were supposed to be doing with your life is exactly why I don't ask God what I should be doing!" I explained to her that God's call for her would be different from God's call to me. God's call is always personal and specific.

Notice how personal, how intimate it is. God's call begins with these beautiful words, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." Think about what that means to us! God knit together our bones and heart. Now if God knit together our bones and heart, don't you think God knows us? Wouldn't His call be specific?

The woman whose story I told earlier was a real estate agent. She was an extrovert. She was from a different religion, but God brought so many people into the church through her. God had knitted in her the gift of evangelism.

If you have ever wondered why you are here, God, the person who made you is the one who can tell you. You are uniquely made, perfectly made for God's purposes.

We seldom think of ourselves as that important and we disappoint God by not seriously working to find our own talents and gifts. We tend to lump ourselves together with others who might seem like us.

That story of my call that mentioned above is one I have told you and I have told you that when I received the call to ministry, I was anything but happy. I was in business. Unlike my younger sister, Jean, I had never considered becoming a pastor. She knew she was going to be a minister from very early on.

We're sisters, but our ministries are very different. She loves preaching and it comes naturally to her. I like preaching, but I have to work at it. I love taking care of people, which is called pastoral care. Jean does it well, but it isn't something she loves. Jean is wise in theology. I get lost in theology. To understand theology I turn to the practical, but Jean understands the nuances.

The point is that God calls us to be uniquely ourselves because God has plans for the person He designed in the womb.

The second thing to notice in our passage is that following God's call is a process, a growing process. Jeremiah tires to say, "No" to God by saying, "Truly, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." We try to beg off, too, but God starts with us where we are and teaches us to go forward.

Jeremiah was worried about being too young, but some of us are worried about being too old. We needn't worry. As Fred Astaire said, "Old age is like everything else. To make a success of it, you've got to start young."

I treasure the book *Firstlight* by Sue Monk Kidd, a marvelous spiritual writer. The book is a collection of her first writings for *Guidepost Magazine*. It is fascinating to read those early stories. Her theology may have grown over the years, but her first writings, including her struggles and doubts, are for me some of the best writing she has ever done. God has been working with her throughout.

One of the most interesting stories she tells is how she woke up one morning with the knowledge that she was a writer. She had never written before. As a matter of fact, she was a nurse. She had planned to be a nurse since her childhood, but God had different plans. God was preparing her to be a writer as she worked as a nurse.

When she realized she was to be a writer, she looked differently at her work as a nurse. She saw new meaning in her work. Her perspective changed.

Following God's call is a process. We may not understand the jagged and confusing paths, but God is preparing us, strengthening us to be His Word. I invite you to think about your talents, your skills, the activities you love and then think about how those talents can be used to the glory of God. You don't have to become a pastor or a missionary, but you must become what God has prepared for you to become.

Can you cook? Can you organize? Then you can help at the Lord's Table. One of my favorite spiritual gifts is called "helps." There are several people in our congregation who have the gift of helps.

Can you read? Volunteer at the Day School or the library. Are you mechanical? Help us with the sound system. Are you handy? We always need fixes around the building.

Are you extraverted? Aren't there people you like who need to know about Geneva? Whatever your talents, the Lord has the first option on them.

I'm talking about helping around the church, but you don't have to stop there? If you like children you can volunteer at Martha's Table or the National Family Center. If you like music, don't just sing in our choir. Do what the Winches and Robyn Alexander do, sing in an area choral group.

If you are a talented manager, use that skill to make your work place better for everyone.

Jane Campbell became an organizer. I still remember seeing her at the Container Store. She told me she had found her calling. You may not remember but Jane Campbell has a Ph. D. in psychology from Harvard, but until the holiday job at the store, she had not found her niche. When her holiday job at the store ended and they didn't hire her permanently, she took on the work of becoming a professional organizer. It was a long haul, but she and her husband have a growing small business. What's more, Jane has written a couple of books. One is on organizing for those who need help. (I would be in that group.) More recently she has brought learning to appreciate one another's gifts. It is a delight!

The story illustrates that Jane had to go through the process of becoming the person that God intended her to be.

There is one more thing to remember: God never sends us out alone. God sent Pepe to help Jane.

God told Jeremiah: "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord."

The Lord is with us and often sends an earthling to help. One of my favorite helpers in the world is my daughter, Olya. She keeps an eye out for me and she lets me know when I'm doing too much. She also has a great sense of humor so when I mis-speak, she laughs with me, not at me.

Remember God's call is always personal because he has knitted us together for specific works and He never sends us out alone. Amen.