

July 8, 2012
Pentecost 6

"Called by the Lord"

JEREMIAH 1:4-10

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." ⁶ "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." ⁷ But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. ⁹ Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Have you ever lost your keys and could not find them? How about your reading glasses, or your cell phone or the remote for the television? I have seen people wear their reading glasses around their neck just so they won't always have to look for them.

A more important question- have you ever lost sight of who you are? It happens all the time. In the daily grind of life we get so involved with our problems and needs that we forget who we are in Christ. Jesus has called us into his kingdom. We are branches connected to him the Vine. He is the bridegroom we are his beloved bride. He is our shepherd and we are the sheep of his pasture. Our service in his kingdom is the highest honor that could ever be bestowed on people.

Today we begin a new series of sermons on the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was called by the Lord to be a prophet. He had his low moments when he lost sight of who he was and the honor the Lord gave him. We can relate to this man of God because we easily lose sight of what the Lord has called us to do at this important time and moment in history.

The plan

The Lord had laid out a plan for Jeremiah long before he was born. "The word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.'" It is the Lord who forms us in the womb. He gives us the color of our eyes, the size of our ears, the intelligence of our minds, the skills of our hands. A few weeks ago we had a little girl coming to our Bible teaching at the transitional shelter. We sang some songs and she has the most beautiful voice. It is the Lord who forms us in the womb and plans out the different parts of our body. Psalm 139 says, "You create my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb."

The Lord did more than plan the body of Jeremiah as it was being formed in the womb of his mother. The Lord says, "Before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Here was a man who was born into a family of priests. He lived

in the little village of Anathoth north of Jerusalem. The Lord had greater plans for him. He was called by the Lord to speak his Word to nations. Jeremiah would deliver words from the Lord that would affect the destiny of the greatest nations on earth.

What do you see when you look into the mirror? You see a body that was formed by the Lord. God designed the heart to pump blood through the 60,000 miles of blood vessels that feed the 100 trillion cells of your body. God designed the brain to store information and sent messages to other parts of your body. God developed your eyes to see and ears to hear. You also see someone special whom God called from all eternity to be one of his children through Jesus his Son. The faith you have in Jesus your Savior did not come to you by luck or chance. It was not something you developed in yourself just as you had nothing to do with forming your body in your mother's womb. Your faith in Christ for your salvation came to you from the Lord and it was planned for you in eternity. Ephesians 1 says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessings in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."

What the Lord told Jeremiah he also tells you this morning. He said, "I have set you apart." The Hebrew word for "set apart" is also translated as "holy." It is the beautiful word "qadosh." We don't set ourselves apart or make ourselves holy. We have nothing to offer God except lives that are tainted with sin. Here is what Jeremiah tells us in chapter 17: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure, who can understand." God has to set us apart and make us holy and acceptable to him. He did everything for us through Jesus his Son. "The blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin." By his death and resurrection Jesus declares us to be qadosh or holy in the eyes of his heavenly Father.

How did Jeremiah respond to God's plan to set him apart and make him a prophet to the nations? Jeremiah reacts the same way Moses did when God called him to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the people go. Jeremiah says, "Ah Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only child." How will you respond when the Lord gives you opportunities to tell someone about Jesus? How easy it is to offer excuses as Jeremiah did and say, "I can't do it. I am child. Someone else needs to do this beside me." Or you can hide under the well worn cliché, "There are two things I never talk about and that is politics and religion." God's plan is to use ordinary people like you and me and Jeremiah to bring his Word to the nations.

The purpose

There is an old saying in management, "You need to plan the work and work the plan." The Lord our God planned the work for Jeremiah and the Lord worked the plan by giving specifics on what Jeremiah would do. "But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

God's purpose could not be stated more clearly for Jeremiah. "You must go to everyone I send you and say whatever I command you." The Lord had some tough jobs for Jeremiah.

One of his assignments was to speak to people on the streets of Jerusalem and warn them of God's judgment that was coming to them if they continued to worship false gods such as Baal. Here is how Jeremiah expresses the frustration of speaking to people who did not want to listen to a word he said, "To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed and they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them."

The word of the Lord is still offensive to people today. On the pages of the Bible we learn the shocking truth about sin. We discover that sin is more than just the really bad things we do in life. It includes the bad thoughts we have and the times we fail to do the good things we should be doing. Romans 3 pronounces this judgment on all people, "All have turned away, they have together become worthless." The Lord calls you to deliver this message to people in your world who are still worshipping their own false gods they have created for themselves. That dear my Christian is a very tough assignment. That is why Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him. And what makes people even more angry is to be told that Jesus has done it all for them. As someone recently wrote on a blog site, "If you want to make people angry tell them they can do nothing to save themselves. If you really want to make them angry then tell them that Jesus had done it all for them." The words of our Bible camp song linger with me, "Living, loving, dying, rising, Jesus did it all for me." Do you realize how offensive this message is?

The Lord told Jeremiah, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you." Literally the Hebrew says, "Do not be afraid of their faces." See Jeremiah standing on the streets of Jerusalem and warning people to stop worshiping idols and return to the Lord. What do you see on the faces of the people as they pass by? I see some faces that are angry. Some show disgust. Some shake their heads just as they did with Jesus when he was hanging on the cross. Some shake their fists. Imagine living your life as long as Jeremiah did with so many people looking at you and not liking you. I don't know about you, but if I have people look at me with anger or disgust or disdain, I couldn't take it.

The Lord told Jeremiah, "I will be with you. I will rescue you." The Lord promises to come through and give Jeremiah a strength that he could never find in himself. Listen to what Paul writes from a prison in Rome as he prepares for a martyr's death under the evil emperor Nero. "The Lord will rescue from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom." If you think your job of letting other people know about Jesus is an impossible task, then remember what Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The power

Just as we lose our keys we can also lose sight of how much power God's Word has to change the lives of people all over the world. "Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my lips and said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." Jeremiah was called by the Lord to deliver judgments on the great nations of the world. The words he delivered from the Lord came true. He predicted the destruction of Babylon with these words, "Like a lion coming up from Jordan's thickets to a rich pastureland, I will chase Babylon from its land in an instant." Cyrus the Mede destroyed Babylon overnight, one of the greatest military accomplishments in history.

Jeremiah delivered the words of the Lord that tore down this nation and created a new super power that sent God's people back to their homeland.

Jesus said of his words, "My words are spirit and they are live." God's word is able to uproot the false beliefs in the lives of people and replace them with saving faith in Jesus. These are the words that have been entrusted to us to bring to the world in these last days. The seed of the Word grows and creates saving faith in Jesus. The Lord has delayed his return. He has called us into his kingdom and asks us to bring the life saving message of the gospel to all nations. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." That's the story of Jeremiah's life and the story of your life and my life. Amen.