

Year C, Proper 16
Jeremiah 1:4-10
August 21, 2022

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;”

This is what God says to Jeremiah. Even before God goes into the specifics of his call, the word of the Lord comes to HIM. Directly to Jeremiah. God tells him how deeply, and intimately he knows him. God had a plan before God formed him in his mother’s womb. So before Jeremiah was even a zygote, God understood who God wanted Jeremiah to be, and before he entered the world as an infant, God consecrated him. God sanctified him—made him holy—set Jeremiah apart and dedicated him to God’s service.

This is a powerfully intimate passage, telling us how deeply God knows and cares for *us*. God knows us better than our parents do—even better than we know ourselves. You might say, well, yes, but Jeremiah was a prophet. It’s different for prophets—God, maybe, picks them out early like this. And, well, yes, it *is* different for prophets. They have an incredibly hard job. Also Jeremiah, was a prophet during an especially hard time, towards the end of the seventh century before Christ, when the Jews were being slaughtered, and transported out of their own country, into captivity in Babylon. As their prophet, part of Jeremiah’s job was to explain to the Jews how these events were their punishment for being unfaithful to God. As you might imagine, this message was not well received. But this sentence,

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;”

applies to ALL of us. Jesus once said that God knows even the number of hairs on our heads—that is to say, *everything* about us. And so if God loves us this much, and cares enough to understand our abilities, gifts and talents, God doesn’t just call prophets, God calls us ALL.

What is God calling YOU to do?

In thinking about that, you might be comforted to hear something we were told in seminary: “God does not call the equipped, God equips the called.” That is to say that we are seldom trained, or even gifted to do the thing God calls us to right away, but we can be educated, and formed to do the work God calls us to do. Jesus’ disciples are a prime example of this. They were not priests, or scriptural scholars, or gifted speakers—a lot of them were fishermen. And they were not very quick learners, either, were they? We can all take comfort in that. And yet God called these twelve men, and equipped them for an incredible ministry. If the disciples can serve God, we *all* can serve God. We can all be called, and trust that we *will* receive what we need to be faithful to that call.

Sometimes it's hard to trust in that equipping, though. Jeremiah objects to God's plan, because he is too young to be a prophet.

"Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.'"

As a child, he has no training in the law, or history, or in how to speak persuasively to groups. How on earth can a boy be a prophet? You can imagine his panic. But really, this response from a prophet is kind of classic. Remember Moses? He argued with God for quite awhile about his call, insisting that he was a nobody, and no one would believe him, and he was a halting speaker. What about Jonah—he tries to run away from God, and ends up in the belly of a fish for three days. And when God calls Ezekiel, the Bible says he goes "in bitterness" to the people of Israel, and is stunned and speechless for seven days after his call. Prophets object to being called, in part, because they know that their job is going to be intensely difficult, and that people are usually not going to be happy to hear what they have to say. Also, resisting a call at first shows appropriate humility. These men don't envision themselves as even worthy of being chosen by God.

Jeremiah's objections are overcome, however, as God equips him.

"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."

In order to equip him, God gives Jeremiah the assurance of his constant presence with him. He will tell him what to say, and he even puts words into his mouth. That's part of what a prophet does—speaks God's words, which is why so many prophecies begin with "thus says the Lord," or "thus says the Lord God." Now Jeremiah feels more prepared for his vocation, but just so you know, he also trains and becomes a priest, as well. He didn't just stand up as a boy, and start quoting God's prophecy. Eventually, all of the prophets do respond to their call, not just because God equips them, but because the work is deeply a part of who they are. Frederick Buechner, the Old Testament scholar and theologian, once defined God's call as "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

What IS God calling you to do?

At the hospital, where I used to work as a clinical chaplain, there are many people for whom healthcare is really a calling, much more than just a job. Nurses, doctors, pharmacists, dietitians and many others, who do what they do because they want to serve God by helping to heal others. And it's not about evangelizing their patients, it's about having compassion for them, and about being the face of Christ to them, even if they never mention God. People who see healthcare as a vocation pray for their

patients as they work with them. Or they listen deeply when someone has a concern. They are intentional in bringing the Holy Spirit into all the work that they do. I imagine you can see how many of the helping professions can become a “calling.”

But any work can be a calling: realtor, store owner, horse breeder—if you see your work as a way to help others. And also, God calls us to different things at different times in our lives. When we’re young, God might steer us in one direction. Once we’ve had certain experiences and education, we might be sent in a different direction. We also might be called to do more than one thing, of course. Mother *and* accountant. Husband *and* musician. Daughter *and* caregiver, *and* nurse—and the list can go on. It is our *intention* to follow God’s call that makes the difference. Being intentional in listening for God, or in watching for the in-breaking of the Divine in our world is key if we want to live a Spirit-led life. Ask for God to lead you, and then expect an answer. It will come. *Then* ask God for the strength and courage to follow the call, because it’s not always easy. In fact, it *often* isn’t easy. But when you are doing what you believe God wants you to be doing, there is peace, and deep satisfaction in that.

What is GOD calling you to do?

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