

Psalm 71:1-6

In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.

Jeremiah 1:1-10

The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

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."

Sermon

The calling of a prophet is one of the most significant moments in the history of the Jewish people. That moment when God speaks to one person and asks them to speak for God to the people. Not only were these events written down with the Biblical narrative, but they were also recognized moments when God continued to show interest and care for the people of Israel. It is significant that the scribe of Jeremiah wants to begin the entire volume of Jeremiah's work but setting it in a historic time frame. It is as if the scribe is saying, "This is what God was doing, through Jeremiah, at this time." On one hand, this helps us place Jeremiah's words in a historical context and connect to what was happening in Israel, Judah, and the rest of the known world. On the other hand, this is also a moment that says, "This is what God was doing then. So what is God doing now, today?"

What God was doing then, was calling Jeremiah as a boy. "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." There are a handful of significant pieces in this first message to Jeremiah. The first is that he is known. Not just a little known, or on the surface, skin deep known. No, God is telling Jeremiah that God knows him better than his own mother. He is known before he was even conceived.

What does this being known mean? Is it simply an awareness that something exists, or is there something deeper to this statement? In Jeremiah's instance, being known was synonymous with being called. Jeremiah was a part of God's plan, he was appointed to be a prophet to the nations. This was no arbitrary call that came out of the blue, but this was a calling that came out of a knowledge of gifts and talents of Jeremiah, and was born out of a knowledge of the times as well, there was a great need for one such as Jeremiah. God knew him and knew his purpose.

A second piece of this opening word is the struggle between Jeremiah's percept of himself verses the way that God perceives him. Jeremiah sees himself a just a boy, not yet a man, not yet wise or worthy to take on the mantle of prophet. Yet God sees one who is ready and able to fulfill the purpose of bringing God's word to the people.

In the midst of the mental and spiritual struggle of Jeremiah to understand and accept his calling, God does something amazing. God breaks through all the questions and doubts and he physically touches Jeremiah's lips. "I have put my words in your mouth. I appoint you over nations, over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

It is a remarkable story for a specific person and a specific time. But I wonder, what is God doing now? Does God still call people to speak God's word? Does God still call people to pluck up and to plant?

This past week I was sitting at a table with a handful of session members and our conversation turned to some of the challenges and difficulties that the session is working through right now. It was in the midst of this conversation that one of the people around the table said, "I felt like God called me to come here to White Lick, and I still feel like God is calling me and White Lick to be God's church in this time and place." Those were words I needed to hear that night and I think those are words we need to hear this morning. What is God doing today? God is calling people like you and I to be a part of this congregation. Calling us to be in relationship and in ministry, in fellowship and in outreach through White Lick Presbyterian Church in Avon Indiana. No matter if you are a first time visitor or a long time comer, God has called you here today, in this sanctuary, to be present but also to be sent out. To hear God's good news of love and faithfulness and to share that good news with others today. To come and see, and to invite others to see for themselves, all the wonderful things God is doing through this congregation.

Now some of us are like Jeremiah, we think less of ourselves than what God thinks. We are too young or too old, we are too busy or our time has passed. We don't know how to talk to others, we don't have enough faith to share with our neighbors. And God is say, "Don't tell me you are not enough, I have made you and you are more than enough." But I believe God is doing more than just tell us we are called, I believe that God is also touching our lips, or shaking our shoulders, or taping our knees. I believe that God is reaching out to us and breaking through our doubts and fears and reassuring us as well, "I have called you by name, trust in me and we will share my Good News." God knew Jeremiah and called him in his day and time. God knows you and God knows me, and God has called us, White Lick Presbyterian Church today. It is time to build up, it is time to plant and God is calling you and me to do our part. Thanks be to God. Amen