

Sermon: Preached January 30, 2022

Preacher: Rev. Judy Arnold

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10 & Luke 4:21-31

These texts both deal with prophets

With how they are selected; how they react; how they come around to saying 'yes'

And then there's how they are accepted as legitimate Prophets – as someone speaking for God

First let's start with Jeremiah – this recounting of his call is similar to God's call to Moses. Neither man/boy jumps at the opportunity. Even when God approaches Jeremiah with such beautiful and powerful words. Before I made you in the womb I knew you; before you were born, I consecrated you. Jeremiah was created to be a prophet. He doesn't quite believe it and tries to talk God into somebody else, anybody else. There are things about this that intrigue and amaze me; and things that seem very familiar. The familiar is Jeremiah's attempt to deny his call. I'm with you there, Jeremiah! Despite my natural laziness – you may recall that the sin I picked out the 7 deadly ones was sloth. Despite that, the idea of being a prophet is terrifying to me – and Jeremiah seems to feel the same way. A prophet sent to the nations – one man asked to tell a community of people how they are not acting the way God wants. I know it's a stereotype – the preacher standing on a soap box yelling about repentance. Another current representation is the school parking lot where a lone doctor has been speaking to parents about vaccines or masks and the disagreeing parents are following the poor guy screaming at him. Jeremiah's task is to get people to come and worship the one God – some of these people have no religion at all apart from some superstitions others have pledged themselves to one or more Gods; others have taken the king or ruler as their God. Jeremiah is called to draw them away from that and to Yahweh. Not only must he convince the people to change their direction, he must also escape being slaughtered by an authority. I'm with Jeremiah – who is going to listen to me; I don't know what to say. That excuse is actually a smoke screen for the fear that such a task fills me with. When we have to tell our daughter the answer to something is 'no' – we go back and forth – are you going to tell her?

Having the Madison Avenue slight of tongue to touch people is rare in an individual – it takes Fortune 500 companies millions of dollars to come up with 'you deserve a break today'. How can God expect one person to do such a thing. You'd think it would be scary to say 'no' to God, but we seem to do that quite easily – perhaps not owning that we are doing such a thing; perhaps fooling ourselves that we are saying 'yes' when our actions scream 'no'. Answering God's call – is daunting, so much so many of us just pretend we don't hear it.

I've had that experience quite recently. You know Will is away, well at least he says he's away, so making a decision about worship fell to me – along with other members of the ministry team

for sure – but I felt the weight of it. And because I’m still in the 1990’s in my thinking – I thought my decision was between having worship or not having worship. I prepared emails for both scenarios and Sarah and I coordinated on when to send them after we’d chosen which option. Even as friends of mine who go to other churches told me about their plans for Zoom worship, it wasn’t really an option I’d considered. Surely that’s where God was calling us – and I suspected the final answer would be to cancel. I know it may sound strange to you, but the Zoom possibility never actually occurred to me. Then at 7:55 Saturday morning someone texted me. People who know me know that I rarely see that hour much less communicate. Reluctantly, I fumbled around for my glasses and grabbed the phone. It was a breezy text from Will (still purporting to be away) saying ‘are you doing Zoom worship tomorrow?’ in the midst of it. I took off my glasses, put the phone down and rolled over. But suddenly it occurred to me we could do Zoom. Could we with no Daniel? What about the music? We can’t do that. Slowly what I was being called to entered my mind – worship isn’t about yes or no – it’s about what’s possible. And on my own – it was impossible. But with the help of God and God’s people it was possible! Luckily God’s people said ‘yes’ unlike Jeremiah (or me). That is the promise that accompanies all God’s calls. I will be with you. I will give you the words to speak, he tells Jeremiah. I will be with you on Zoom, I will be with you as you present and explain a budget, I will keep you strong so you can sing to my people with your mask on. We can answer God’s call, we know it’s God’s call, God does not send out repair people = God sends prophets, God isn’t a boss who parcels out tasks and waits for them to be delivered. God created us; before you were born, I consecrated you. Each of us – Jeremiah as a prophet; you as a soprano; and you with an organized mind and clear communication; each of us is called by God at certain times for certain things – lofty and public; humble and quiet. We are not being thrown in at the deep end, we are being drawn into deeper waters by God’s strong and faithful hands.

After saying all this, it might seem contradictory to read the Luke text where when Jesus declares that the scripture has been fulfilled in him, initially they are impressed by his preaching, but then the townspeople all start grumbling – hey isn’t that Joseph’s son? Who does he think he is. Jesus isn’t put off, doesn’t feel God’s absence; he says what he’s always known -no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.

Outline for the rest of the sermon

1. We all know when we feel like we’re not good enough
2. No one can make you feel that way as easily as those who know you well.
3. Jesus says, “today this scripture has been fulfilled....” Unlike the reluctant prophets, Jesus affirms his call and his mission.
4. The scripture is from Isaiah: and confirms that it includes good news to the poor; freedom for the prisoners; recovery of sight for the blind; setting the oppressed free.
5. In elaborating on his mission he uses two instances when prophets went beyond Israel to heal or instigate change.
6. His mission is to change the world - to upset the hierarchy.
7. We are all called to that mission.
8. We are ALL called; we are called to serve ALL.