

Jeremiah's Call, St. David's Episcopal, 8/21/2022, Jeremiah 1:4-10 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

Today we begin looking at stories about the prophet Jeremiah (including Lamentations, traditionally attributed to him) and we will continue looking at Jeremiah until All Saints' Sunday. We will hear him warn his people and hear him lament as he is ignored again and again and then what happens next. It's a tough story, and an important one that starts today.

It starts with a classic call story, something like the ones we hear for Moses and Samuel and Isaiah and even Mary, the mother of Jesus. We hear God calling followed by protestations and then an affirmation. Jeremiah's is a little different, however, because of God's words "Before you were born I consecrated you." God tells Jeremiah that his fate was sealed before birth.

What are your spiritual thoughts about such things? I have mixed feelings. I believe that we are born with some gifts and preferences, but we also develop others, and I don't know how all of that mixes together. I hear over and over again, for example, the importance of reading to children and the way that can help them in later life. I have a four-year-old great niece named Alice who LOVES books. Apparently, she gets in trouble for reading after bedtime. As a booklover myself, I am crazy about her and encourage that passion at every opportunity. On my recent vacation, she would have had me read every book in the state of Arizona out loud to her if her parents hadn't made her stop asking me.

How much of that had God determined before she was born, and how much did she learn from her parents? I have no idea.

Jeremiah is so far from that little girl. What a burden for baby Jeremiah, to be the prophet called to implore his people to repent from their evil ways and turn to the Lord, only to be ignored again and again and again. I hope Jeremiah had relatives doting over him as a baby before he had to go annoy everyone and lament for the rest of his life.

Episcopalians tend to emphasize God's love over God's judgement for sin. That's what drew many people to the Episcopal Church from other Christian traditions such as evangelicalism or Catholicism. Sometimes something gets lost when we only talk about love and never mention sin. As we study the prophets this summer and into the fall, including Jeremiah for the next two and a half months, we need to be prepared to remember that God has expectations of us.

God *is* all about love. We can never do something to change God's love for us. Not murder, adultery, theft. Nothing can change God's love.

But God does have expectations. We can let God down. We all do let God down, again and again. I am not saying this to you to make you feel bad about yourself or to drive you back to evangelicalism or Roman Catholicism. When we become baptized, we repent, and vow that whenever we fall into sin, we will repent and return to the Lord. This summer, through the prophets, we are called to repent. To turn back toward God.

Today's reading is a sobering one, with God saying to the child Jeremiah that God consecrated him for this task as a prophet to the nations before he was born, and that he will pluck up and pull down, destroy and overthrow. But it ends with more positive words: to build and to plant.

To build and to plant: that's the part I hope St. David's can focus on. We are rebuilding after the pandemic. I'm thrilled that Sunday School restarts in less than a month, and Fall Formation follows right after. Making manna bags last weekend was a joy—hope you all have picked one up to hand out when you see someone hungry. Our new website is live and beautiful and welcoming. The pumpkin plants that the kids planted at Vacation Bible School under guidance from Ginny Butler are blossoming.

That emphasis on building and planting, and God's call to Jeremiah remind us that God's gifts to us are not meant only for us. Just like I confidently said that we all let God down, I unequivocally tell you that God has given *you* gifts. Some of you are prophets like Jeremiah—I've told one or two of you before that I think you are a prophet. You know who you are. That's not my gift, but I do have gifts, and so do every single one of you. Don't ignore your gifts or slough them off like Jeremiah did by saying he was only a boy, like Moses saying he has never been eloquent.

As a Christian, as a child of God, you are meant to *share* your gifts. As your pastor, I hope that you will share some of those gifts with your church family as we build—rebuild—and plant. Watching Dana develop and hone her creative gifts for our children stirs my soul. See Sharon and Liz and Kay pull together those manna bags last week were gifts in action. I won't name more gifted people because then someone gets left out and gets their feelings hurt. This church exists because people used their God-given gifts to give back to God, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The word of the Lord has never come to me as clearly as it did to Jeremiah in the opening words of today's reading, and I suspect that few of you have heard God as clearly as Jeremiah did. But I ask you to listen for God. What are you being called to do? How can you use your gifts to build and to plant?