

Scriptures: Hebrews 12:18-29; Jeremiah 1:4-10

Biblical Prophecy

Today's sermon is the seventh in our series on Prophet Margins. We've looked at various Old Testament prophets, and today we'll spend some time with Jeremiah. The different prophets we've studied had a gift, given to them by God – they had courage to speak the truth of His word, in love. As we dive into Jeremiah this morning, I hope you'll think about how God is calling you to offer a prophetic witness in our time and place.

If you have a Bible, or Bible app handy, turn with me to the first chapter of Jeremiah. We're going to look at the fourth through the tenth verse. I'm reading from the New International Version today. **Read Jeremiah 1:4-10.**

There are a lot of people who hear the term "Biblical prophecy," and they automatically switch into a mode where they assume the focus is going to be on predicting the future, trying to forecast "the Rapture," and second coming of Christ. The Old Testament prophets were less concerned with predicting the future than with proclaiming God's word to the people living in their day. They didn't distinguish between the good, the bad, and the ugly – of who's saved and who isn't – they were busy confronting the sinful nature of all people, and calling all of them to repentance and right relationship with God and each other. As Micah said, "What does God require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

That's something we should be mindful of today, as followers of Jesus Christ. That's what He calls us to do in this day and age. To love God, and others. And while our text this morning looks specifically at the call story of Jeremiah, what God tells Jeremiah is something He also says to us.

I Knew You

"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,'" (Jer. 1:4-5). Now that's a true statement of every person who loves and follows Jesus Christ! They're made in His image – He formed them in the womb – and He knew them *before* He did it. He expects us to follow Him wholeheartedly.

He says, "I set you apart." You're different. You're special. You're of inestimable worth to Him. In fact, you're so precious to Him, that He sent His own Son to die on the cross for your sin, and to be a pathway to a right and restored relationship with Him! Our God is amazing! He does remarkable things!

Now knowing that, what's it mean when He says, "I appointed you as a prophet to the nations?" Well, while it's specifically said to Jeremiah, I believe it applies to us all. Here's why I think this way. One reason is the definition of the word "prophet." In the Bible, we see many prophets – many people who spoke on behalf of God.

They were making His word known. Looking at the Merriam-Webster dictionary online, they have about four definitions for prophet, including: "one who utters divinely inspired revelations, one gifted with more than ordinary spiritual and moral insight, one who foretells future events, an effective or leading spokesman for a cause, doctrine, or group." Look, Jesus gives the apostles what's become known as the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19-20. He says, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Go Make Disciples

That's the directive given by the Lord to each one of us if we're truly following Him. It's not just the clergy's job in the Church – it's the job of all the people in the Church. It's the job of every person in the Church – in the United Methodist Church in general, to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." That's basically a rephrase of the Great Commission. It's also the job of every person at New Hope United Methodist Church, to "make disciples of Jesus Christ and to bring hope, grace, and salvation to God's people." That's your mission statement, New Hope. It's the job of every person who worships with us here week after week – to make disciples, to bring hope, grace, and salvation.

We do that by living, talking, and acting like Jesus Christ. Well, you may be sitting there thinking, "I can't do that. It's not my job." Notice what Jeremiah does. "Ah, Sovereign Lord," he says, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child," (Jer. 1:6). In other words, "I'm too young to do it." Or, to put it another way, "I'm too _____ to do it." Fill in the blank. Too old. Too tired. Too busy. Too sick.

We call those excuses. And we're really good at making them, aren't we, church? Notice how God responds to Jeremiah's excuse. "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you," (verse 7). In those days, the Bible mainly only consisted of the Torah – those first five books attributed to Moses – maybe Job, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and the books of Samuel, the Kings, and Chronicles. By not having as much Biblical background as we do, it must have been a pretty unnerving experience for Jeremiah to hear what he heard from God.

Seeing Jesus In Us

Another thing I want to point out, since we're going to do a Back-to-School blessing in just a minute is this. Kids, your words and actions in school impact how others see Jesus Christ. If you're a bully and you pick on other kids – you make Jesus out to be a mean-spirited bully. If you're mouthy, and talk back to teachers – you make Jesus out to be a lippy and disrespectful to authority. Of course, for the adults, the same thing could be said in the workplace, and in the halls of government! Some time when you get a chance check out Romans 13:1-10. It's an eye-opener. Paul tells us we're to respect those in authority over us. The world is looking at us – watching how we treat others – to see what Jesus is like. We must represent Him well!

The next thing God says to Jeremiah in our Scripture today is very comforting. “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord,” (Jer. 1:8). Despite being unnerved about being told to “go to everyone... and say,” God assures Jeremiah that He is with him. He's with us today, too, friends. He never leaves us or forsakes us! He promises to rescue Jeremiah – now that's not saying Jeremiah's ministry is going to be a stroll down Easy Street, or a piece of cake. What God's saying to Jeremiah – the same thing God says to us even today – is that He's with us and He'll rescue us. Even in the valleys, the sorrows and woes of life – even in the fire of persecution – He's with us.

I hope that's as comforting to you, as it is to me, and as it was to Jeremiah. That ended Jeremiah's immediate protest about being a prophet – a person who spoke the word of God. “Then the Lord reached out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘Now I have put My words in your mouth,’” (verse 9), we're told next. You know, as followers of Jesus, we should feel confident in the Scriptures. We should be spending time with the word of God – the Scriptures – every day. It should be an on-going, daily habit. Like showering, putting on deodorant, and brushing our teeth!

Make It A Daily Habit

There are a lot of people in the Church, in general, today, who don't feel confident in the Scriptures. What I mean is, they say they don't understand it. It's mysterious to them. I'd feel the same way if I picked up a mechanic's manual on how to fix the engine of a car, and just looked at a couple sentences with the assumption that I'd be able to get the car running again. I'm no mechanic, but if I'm going to study something about a car to try to fix it – and reading Scripture is a study – I'm going to pour over the text until I “get it.” And it wouldn't just be a brief overview cherry-picking of what I wanted to find, I'd be reading the whole thing to better understand what I'm doing.

In a nutshell, that's what we're called to do – to study His word – and it has to be more than just a brief overview. It has to be on-going, long-term, habitual. When we do

that, the Scriptures make a lot more sense. Friends, beware! If you do get into a daily habit of Scripture reading, you'll see the Bible stories written thousands of years ago, playing out over again in our day. You'll hear of people on the news doing horrible things. You'll hear of kings and leaders focused on self, wealth, and power instead of the best interests of their people. And occasionally, you may hear or see a passing mention of how kind or compassionate someone is in a particular moment.

"See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant," (verse 10) God tells Jeremiah at the end of our text today. That same appointment applies to the Church today. He's given us a purpose – to make Him known and to stand against the forces of wickedness. Right now the world prays, "not Thy will, but mine be done." It's a mess! The world, our society, is so sin-sick it can't even recognize the deep need it has. And the whole world is in desperate need of God's grace, and the salvation which only comes from the shed blood of Jesus Christ!

Prayer: Creator God,

Whose fingers sculpt sun and moon and form the baby's ear;

Spirit, brooding over chaos before the naming of day;

Savior, sending us to earth's ends with water and words:

startle us with the grace, love, and communion of Your unity in diversity,
that we may live to the praise of Your majestic Name. Amen.