

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time
January 31, 2010

Jeremiah 1:4-10

⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵"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."

⁶Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." ⁷But 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,
⁸Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD."

⁹Then 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.
¹⁰See, 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."

Luke 4:21-30

²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" ²⁴And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. ²⁵But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in

the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." 28When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

“No, No, No...Know, Know, Know”

God makes it clear—there is work to be done. There is purpose for being. Jesus had a clarity about his identity and knew that there was a purpose for his living: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news, ...to proclaim release, to let the oppressed go... this is the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jeremiah. The people of Nazareth. They are not so clear about this idea that God it makes it clear that there is a purpose for being and there is work to be done. They are clear about that which we too often tend to be clear about—we want to live out the purpose in the moment that is easy and pleasing to the self. We want to go it the easy way that is familiar and comfortable and known.

So when God comes knocking we say—“Oh, that can’t be God. I did not hear an audible voice.” Yet this God of ours uses that holy nudge that inside—that interior voice that is often the sound of our own voice/soul calling us to that which love and justice demands. God’s call comes to us in the voice of the community that allows us to see the need. God’s call comes to us in the clear words of Scripture—the very place where Jesus turned there in the synagogue that day.

We have been called. We have been set apart. We have been called and set apart by the one holy and perfect God. We have been called and set apart by the one who in water baptism and with morsel of bread and

taste of wine is continually calling us to functionally live into the reality of the Body of Christ.

We are Jeremiah. We are the people of Nazareth. And in our best and in our clearest we are Jesus—at least a little Jesus.

But most of the time we are not in our best. Most of the time we are not in our worst either. Most of the time we tend to just wander on and wander through with our eyes, and our vision too, fixed on us and the moment rather than any greater good and holy God that destines us for God's purpose.

It was the case with Jeremiah. When God came a callin'—"Jeremiah, here is what you will be about." Jeremiah was filled with excuses.

"I can't do that—I'm too young." We would probably be more likely to say, "I can't do that I'm too old."

Too old. Too young. Too busy. Too overwhelmed. Too involved. Too...anything... ah it is all excuses. Excuses. Excuses.

They are excuses to stay in our own little cocoon. They are excuses to stay in our own little comfortable view of how we want things to be. They are excuses to keep going the notion that we are in charge of our own lives making ourselves into the God of our world and sure to shut out the reality of the big, holy God that calls us both in the stillness of the night and in the bright of the light.

No. No excuses.

We love our excuses. We need them in the dysfunction of our living. We love our excuses because they keep things in the balance that is most pleasing and most tasteful. Our excuses keep us large and God small.

Our excuses keep God out there and tiny and only a part of our existence. It is backwards.

No excuses. None. They keep us from knowing the awesome God who calls us into life and leans into us and says—“You. You are the one.” Know it. K..N..O..W...know it. You are the one. This big God has a purpose for your little life.

Too afraid. Too afraid. It is fear that keeps us from much. We might walk around with those tough exteriors that put out the message to the world, “hey, I’m not afraid of anything.” But in the stillness of the night and in the bright of honest to goodness honesty we are afraid of everything.

We are afraid of everything. We are afraid of getting hurt. We are afraid of taking a risk. We are afraid someone will know us—I mean that someone will really, really, really know us and see all that is in there—oh we are so afraid of that. We are so afraid that if anyone knew how we really feel inside they would run from us.

Oh, God knows. God knows it so well. God knows it so well that even before Jeremiah could admit his fear the word of the Lord is clear bright light. It is the constant angelic message that we hear over and over again in Scripture: “Do not be afraid”

No fear. None of it. No need for it. Yes fear can motivate us—but most of the time fear stops us. Fear stops us from living the purpose that God calls us too.

Fear, that quiet, unspoken, unarticulated rudder in our lives rules the direction we travel and stops us when God places before us that need, that work, that vision, that calling. When our fear is big and our God is small—we are not living the freedom of love that calls us into.

No fear. Do not be afraid—there is this God who holds you and has you. This very God of creation is the one who is encircling you. Trust that God. Allow that God to be larger than your fears.

God needs to be larger than our deepest fears. Know—K..N..O..W..this God of love who encircles you with power and strength and fortitude. Know—K..N..O..W.. this big, holy God of love who encircles you with purpose. You are the one. Little you and little me – this big God is calling to you and to me.

No excuses. No fear. No limits.

We thrive on boundaries and limits. We like things clear. We like thing concrete rather than random. We like it black and white. What are the rules, what is the requirement, how many things need to be checked off the list—we thrive on the limitations. Those are the questions we ask.

It was the case for the town’s people of Nazareth that day in the synagogue. How was it that they could so quickly turn on Jesus? Here he had just made his purpose clear. “Today this is fulfilled in your hearing.” Immediately we read, “All spoke well of him.” And then in just a few verses later, we read that they are taking him out to the edge of town where they want to throw him off a cliff.

How is it that such happens? One moment the love is there and in next moment it is completely turned the other direction. How is that possible?

It is about the limits. We like to know the limits and boundaries. We like to know where the edge is. We like to know who is in and who is out. We like what we like how we like it in the way we like it and it had better not change. Limits and boundaries.

Jesus pushed those. Jesus invited them to see that day that God was using people beyond the boundary of how they understood their world to be. They understood this God of theirs to be for them—they understood this God of theirs to be for Israel. Their God was too small.

Jesus showed them that in the widow of Zeraphath and in Naaman. They were outside Israel. God used them. They were part of the circle. But for the town's people that was beyond their boundary. It was past their limit. They could not conceive of a God that big—they demanded a smaller God who was just for them. And so they wanted to toss him off the cliff.

Jesus emerges from them.

No limitations. No boundaries. We have drawn those limitations. We have drawn those boundaries. We have drawn them about who is in and who is out. We have drawn those limitations and boundaries about what our capabilities are. We have drawn those limitations and boundaries about what our capacities are. We have drawn those limitations and boundaries about what we are willing to do and what we are not willing to do.

We have drawn those limitations and boundaries even to our God in order to keep God small enough to not challenge our limitations and boundaries.

Oh...no limits. No boundaries. This is a big, holy God who calls us to live beyond the limitations and beyond the boundaries.

We see that most clearly in Jesus the Christ. Just as soon as the limitation of death had been imposed the three days pass. And he emerges and passes through the midst of them. The limitation of death and the impossible boundaries were no more.

This God of ours is bigger than all those limitations and all those boundaries that we can draw.

No limitations. No boundaries. And know..K..N..O..W.. know this God who calls you, and me, and this church to a purpose that is bigger than we draw, imagine, and design. Know..K..N..O..W..know this God of ours who sets us to this purpose of changing lives and growing lives in such a way that we know—K..N..O..W..know that we have been called in our little existence by this big, holy God who says, “You are the one.” Amen.