

February 2, 2025 – Jeremiah 1:4-10

It's amazing how little we know about many people in the Bible. I mean, these are great men and women of faith who did things that shaped the entire course of human history. Who said and wrote things that have had a profound impact on our lives. But we don't know that much about them.

Oh, the Bible has a few biographies, of course. Jesus being the most obvious. We know about his life from conception to death to resurrection and ascension. We even know what he's going to do in the future. We know everything about Jesus' life.

And there a few others. Moses, for example. We get a pretty full picture of his life, from birth to death. Samuel. David. There's a handful who have fairly complete biographies.

But the vast majority do not. The vast majority are simply dropped into our laps without any biography. Without any backstory. Without any real explanation of who they were. All we know is that God chose them to do something, and now they are important.

That's exactly what we find with the prophet Jeremiah this morning. We get three verses prior to our reading, telling us that Jeremiah is the son of a priest named Hilkiah from the town of Anathoth in the tribe of Benjamin, and that he became a prophet during the reign of King Josiah. And then Jeremiah introduces himself with these words: *"Now the word of the Lord came to me."*

That's it. No explanation. No backstory. No biography. We don't know how old Jeremiah is. He will tell us he considers himself a youth, but we have no way of knowing what that means exactly. Is he actually a child? Is he a teenager? Is he a young man? We don't know.

We don't know what Jeremiah did for a living before he was a prophet. He didn't consider himself a particularly good speaker, but that doesn't tell us much. Was he a priest like his father? Was he in training to become a priest? Did he do something else entirely? We don't know.

Jeremiah is such an important prophet of the Old Testament. A major figure in the history of Israel. The last prophet before the nation would be taken into exile. But we know so little about him.

All we know is this: The word of the Lord came to him. And because of that, he was a prophet. Because of that, God had called him to a very special purpose. Because of that, his life was transformed.

It turns out, that's a pretty common event in the Bible. The Word of the Lord comes to somebody and their entire lives are turned upside down. The Word of the comes to somebody and whoever they were before simply doesn't matter, because God has a new purpose for them to accomplish.

The Word of the Lord came to Noah. We don't know what Noah did before the Word of the Lord came to him. It doesn't really matter. Because as soon as the Word of the Lord came to him, Noah became a ship-builder. He had a new purpose.

The Word of the Lord came to Abraham. We don't know what Abraham did before the Word of the Lord came to him. It doesn't really matter. Because as soon as the Word of the Lord came to him, Abraham became sojourner to a promised land and the father of a great nation, too numerous to number. He had a new purpose.

The Word of the Lord came to Mary and Joseph. We don't know much about Mary or Joseph. We don't know how old either of them were. We don't know anything about their parents. We don't know what their plans were after they got married. It doesn't really matter. Because as soon as the Word of the Lord came to them, Mary became the mother of her Savior. Joseph became the guardian of his Lord. They had a new purpose.

This is what happens to a person when the Word of the Lord comes to them. Whatever their purpose, their motivation, their identity before the Word came to them goes right out the window. It doesn't matter who they were before. Because the Word of the Lord has made them something new. It has set them on a new path. It has given them a new purpose.

And that's exactly what happens to Jeremiah as well. And he's not particularly happy about it. You read these opening verses of Jeremiah and he sounds an awful lot like Moses. Moses insisted that he was a bad choice to lead the Israelites out of Egypt because he was a poor speaker and had a speech impediment of some sort.

Jeremiah says something similar. *"Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth."* Jeremiah is a reluctant prophet, doing his best to talk God out of his decision.

And, also like Moses, he will continue to be a reluctant prophet. More than once during his ministry, he will turn to God and say, "Why Lord? Why did you send me to these stubborn, sinful people? Why did you give me this terrible message to deliver? Why do I have to preach to people who are constantly threatening to kill me?"

He's not happy about the calling God has given to him. Probably all the more so because God knew exactly what was coming. From the very beginning, God tells him, *"Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord."*

God knew that Jeremiah would spend his life being hated and threatened and abused by the very people to whom he was preaching. And he sent him anyway. He sent him for two reasons.

First, he sent him because God himself was going to be with Jeremiah every step of the way. Which did not mean that Jeremiah would live a life without suffering. But it did mean that Jeremiah would never have to fear the threats of those around him.

For God had chosen him for this very purpose. Before Jeremiah was formed in the womb, God knew him. Before Jeremiah was born, God had consecrated and appointed him as a prophet to the nations. God had a mission for Jeremiah. And Jeremiah's life would not end before that mission was accomplished.

Second, God sent Jeremiah into this awful situation because, despite what Jeremiah thought of it, it was really a tremendous honor. God had put his Word on Jeremiah's lips. He had touched his mouth and enabled him to speak divinely inspired words.

And that put him into a position of authority that was above nations and kingdoms. It gave him power to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. To speak God's Word gave Jeremiah the power to bind and to loose. To pour out God's wrath and to heal with God's grace. Jeremiah may not have enjoyed being a prophet, but it was a great honor, a great privilege, a great responsibility, nonetheless.

It is a great honor, privilege, and responsibility for us as well. No, we are not prophets like Jeremiah, don't get me wrong. I am not going to claim that I have the exact same calling or office that Jeremiah had.

However, we do have some things in common. For the Word of the Lord has come to all of us as well. It came to us at our baptism, when a pastor said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." It came to us at our confirmation, when a pastor spoke a Word from the Lord over us, to remind us of our baptismal grace.

It comes to us when I proclaim Christ's absolution over each of us at the beginning of the service. It comes to us when we hear the lessons in the middle of the service. It comes to us when we hear the Words of Institution at the end of the service.

The Word of the Lord has come to us. We are chosen for a purpose. Before you were formed in the womb, God knew you. Before you were born, God knew exactly how you would fit into his kingdom. God has a mission for you. And your life will not end before that mission is accomplished.

I know that because that's exactly what happened to our Lord, into whose name you are baptized. For Christ had a very similar ministry to Jeremiah. He said things that people didn't want to hear. He spoke God's Law and warned of God's wrath to people with great power. And he was hated for it. He was threatened and abused and beaten for speaking the Word of the Lord. But unlike Jeremiah, they actually did kill Jesus.

But he went to that death unafraid. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, but he remained silent. For he knew the mission the Father had given to him. He knew that in his sacrifice it was finished. And he knew that he would be delivered from death on Easter morning.

The Word of the Lord has come to us in Jesus Christ. And because it came to us in Jesus Christ, we live without fear, no matter how much the world may hate us. For the mission God has for us will be accomplished. And we will be delivered.

And so, we accept the task given to us as an honor and a privilege and a great responsibility. For we, the Church, have been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. We have been given power to pluck up and break down. To destroy and to overthrow. To build and to plant. To bind and to loose. To forgive and to withhold forgiveness.

We are over nations and over kingdoms, for we are not part of the kingdoms of this world. We are part of the kingdom of God. And what we were before doesn't really matter. For we have a new purpose in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.