

## **“Called and sent. We are.” Jeremiah 1:4-10**

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, “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.” Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” But 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. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.” Then 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. See, 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.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

For our meditation today we have the words of our Lord brought to us through Jeremiah the prophet. The verses that we heard, the event that was related to us is known as the call of Jeremiah. What a suitable reading for our situation as we try to discern what the will of God for our congregation is, and what He invites us to do.

But first, I would like to share with you some personal details, a little bit from my own journey with this God who just shows up, invades our lives, turns everything upside down and then cheerfully commands: “Follow me!”

I was nothing like Jeremiah when the word of the Lord came to me for the first time, good 30 years ago. I was young and competitive, willing to take on risks, to prove that I can do this and I can do that. I really want to use the word “foolish”.

When my first pastor asked me and a few of my friends for help, inviting us to take on some tasks in our congregation, we didn’t hesitate. Surely, I was only a boy and didn’t know how to speak, or what to say, but that didn’t seem to bother me, or any of my equally passionate friends.

Let’s do it! That was the attitude. “We are young, we are eloquent, we are smart, people like us, we will come up with something. We will build the Church. We will bring people to Jesus. We will show everyone how great Christians we are.”

“We will, I will...”. The devil probably sneered: “Aha, got you! These are going to be easy targets.” And easy targets we were. And we all fell. All of us. And great was the falling. As Jesus describes it:

**“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders ... looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings**

**seven other spirits ... and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first.”** That is exactly what happened with us.

We learned the hard way that ... apart from Jesus we can do nothing. Our efforts to do something for Jesus on our own, whatever noble or well-intended they may appear to us or to others, they lead us nowhere. They accomplish nothing.

Then the Word of the Lord came to me again. Almost ten years later. And thanks be to God, that experience was much more like Jeremiah's. I was looking for excuses: "But Lord, you know that I have failed you. But Lord, you know what I have done, and where I have been. You know who I am, you can't be serious calling me!"

Our gracious God responded the way He speaks to us all. "Do you think that because you have failed, I will abandon you? Do you think that because you have turned away from me, I will turn away from you? Do you think that because you rejected me, I will reject you? No, never ever I will forget about you! I have created you. I have chosen you, and I will be with you."

It was God's grace that called me. I didn't deserve it then. I don't deserve it now. I am not much different now than I was back then. Still the same accent, perhaps less hair, stiffer back. But... Jesus knows all the thoughts and passions of my heart. He knows how many times I fail Him every day. I stand here only by the grace of our God.

We all live only by God's grace, day by day... The grace of God... it is given to us again and again, and especially when our Lord assures us in our doubts, when we begin to realize that we are not good enough on our own, that we are, indeed, sinners, and can't change it: "**[My child], before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.**"

How sweet these words! This is what God Yahweh said to Jeremiah. This is what Jesus said to Paul, this is what our Father says to each one of you. "**[My dear child, I chose you before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in Christ. And I will make you holy and blameless in Christ.**"

This is what He does in our lives, we can't scare Him away – and our failures, our foolishness, and arrogance, our addictions, our passions... they've nothing comparing with God's grace given to us in Jesus. He just wouldn't give up on us. Ever.

Thus, the Lord spoke to me again, and called me again. We need to understand this – our God doesn't call us into His family because we are good, or better than others, may such false ideas be far from us, He calls everyone because He is a gracious God, and He longs to pour His grace over us, His little rebellious creatures.

The story of Jeremiah's call is also our story. It is a story of every Christian. We all are called, by God's grace. The word for church in Ancient Greek is ekklesia, which literally means those who are called out.

We are people whom God has called out from this world. We are people, **"whom the Father has rescued from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son."** You all are called. Have no doubt about it!

The Word of God has come to all of you, just as He came to Jeremiah. The Spirit of God has made His dwelling with you. You are a new creation. You are God's beloved, chosen before the beginning, chosen for the eternity. Just think about it...

And we all are sent. Whenever God calls anyone, He also sends them. That's how it works. Think about Abraham. Remember? "Go! Leave everything and go!" Think about Moses. The same story. "Go! I send you where you are afraid to go. Go!"

Think about Jeremiah. **"Go! For I have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land... They [all] will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you... to deliver you."**

Yes, we may want to object, but those were special people, they were called and sent, not us. We are just ordinary people. No! Don't say that! There are no ordinary people among the people of God.

Don't you know that you all are **"chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, [called] in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."**

This is what Jesus says to you. As Matthew has recorded it. **"Go... and make disciples!"** As Mark has recorded it. **"Go ... and proclaim the Good News!"** As Luke has recorded it. **"Go ... and proclaim repentance and forgiveness!"**

As John has recorded: **"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you [...] Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."** All of this is said to us.

But... **"Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."** Does this sound familiar? I don't know how to speak and I don't know what to say. I fear what people may think of me. No one will listen to me. What if they reject me?

That's often our reaction when the Lord calls us. That was my reaction when He called me again. "I just don't know enough." There is great wisdom in this saying: **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."** For this fear helps us to place our trust in God, instead of ourselves. And this is what our call as Christians is about.

We need to be clear about this one thing – what is it that we sent to deliver? We are not sent to bring and share ourselves, or our own ideas, but... Jesus, the Word of God. We need to realize that there is nothing more precious, nothing more needed that we can bring to this dying world than the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A couple years ago in one of our fraternal gatherings we had a presenter who spoke about the same reality. He told about a group of researchers who were looking at what those churches who were healthy and strong, what were they doing.

And this is what they found. First, they listed things that were not important at all. See if you recognize any of them. To be healthy and strong as a congregation we don't need – a certain size, or trendy location.

Or to be “cool” according to the latest trends, or to have modern buildings, or to have big budgets, or to have “contemporary” worship services, or to water-down Biblical teachings, or to have an entertaining ministry program. These things are not essential, they do not deliver... period. But what then works?

So, they reported what does work. And we shouldn't be surprised. Two things. First, the Gospel message, the message of Jesus, the Word of God, clearly, richly and abundantly preached and taught. The Word of God is what creates the Church.

And the second. God's people who live as God's people, transformed by the Gospel, gracious and caring in their relationships, both in their congregations, but also in their relationships with their neighbours. Sharing God's grace with everyone.

That's simple. Isn't this liberating to acknowledge that, indeed, the Church doesn't, she can't grow by our efforts, whatever great and clever they may appear in our own eyes, but only by the power of God's Word. And you know what happens when Christians speak the words of our God.

It is not us alone, it is Jesus speaking through us. When we deliver His message, it is the Holy Spirit who accompanies our speech. That's why the Lord said to Jeremiah, **“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.**

**Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” The Lord put out His hand and touched [Jeremiah's] mouth; and the Lord said to [him], “Now I have put my words in your mouth.”** I have put my words in your mouth...

Feel it! Our God Himself puts His words in our ears and in our mouth and we are just to receive them and to eat them up. He does it here, in the Divine Service, He does it when we study the Word, discuss, and meditate upon it.

Sure, it is not always what we want to eat. How often one can hear Christians complaining: “That is too hard, that is too heavy! Give us milk and lollies!” Junk food seems to almost always appeal to our taste. Not so with healthy food.

It is easy to put in our ears and our mouth the news and stories of this world, the latest rumours and scandals, the latest reasons to complain and gossip about someone thus putting them down, and showing how good we are comparing with others.

It is not so easy to taste the Word of God. It is not what our old Adam naturally desires. But when it happens, by God’s grace... This is how Jeremiah describes it: **“I ate your words, and they became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.”** When we eat the words of God, they become also to us our joy and delight of our hearts.

We should not be surprised. For the Word of the Lord is not like ordinary words. By this Word in the beginning **“all things in heaven and on earth were created... all things have been created through Him and for Him.”**

This Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And this Word is not far from us. He is on your lips and He is in your hearts. You know the name of this Word. His name is Jesus Christ. By Him you are called.

Into Him you are called to be one body, the Church. His name we bear – we are called Christians. He became your Brother, and His Father has become your Father. By Him you are sent, and He Himself accompanies you.

He is our message, and He is also our final destination.

When He returns in His divine glory, and the day is coming, you will be made to be like Him, and you will see Him as He is, and you will reign with Him forever.

It is good to be called. It is good to be sent.

And so... you are.

Amen.