

“Are you a prophet? Yes? No?” 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 to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

“Are you a prophet?” this young man asked me. That was a genuine question. “No, I am not!” But a few hours later as our conversations unfolded, he asked again: “But maybe you are a prophet? How would you know? Why would you say that you are not?”

What would you say, how would you answer? I had this conversation a few weeks ago, while serving at the Latvian Summer High School in Normanville. Often those, whom the Holy Spirit is bringing into the divine fellowship with Himself and with the Father and with our Lord Jesus Christ, ask really good questions.

Questions that force us to consider aspects of our Christian faith and life which we may not have considered before. Like this one: “Are you a prophet?” I am asking this one to each one of you? Seriously. Are you? Yes? No? How would you know the answer?

Today for our meditations we read words from the book of Jeremiah the prophet where his call to serve as a prophet to the nations was described. You are not Jeremiah and you are not a prophet like Jeremiah. That’s for sure. Even if many have had rather extraordinary experiences with our Triune God.

I am not Jeremiah either, nor am I a prophet like Jeremiah. That is also certain. But there is something in this question, or rather in the answer that the Scripture gives to this question. Let’s see how what we heard from Jeremiah can help us as we consider what to answer to such an unexpected question. The call of Jeremiah is remarkable. **“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.”**

The Lord Himself spoke to Jeremiah - even as we don't know how exactly it happened that "the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah" - and the Lord said something that makes shivers run down our spines: **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you."** Imagine if He said it to you!

Does this remind you of anything else in the Bible? Paul the apostle said something very similar: **"He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me."** (Gal 1:15) The same story. Before Paul was born, God had set Him apart.

Does this remind you of anything else in the Bible? What about this? **"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."** (Ps 139:13-14) Who is this about?

Or this one? **"He chose us in Him [God chose us in His Son] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him."** (Eph 1:4) Who was this said and written about, what do you reckon? About you, yes, about you!

Similarly, as God knew and had set apart Jeremiah long before he was even born, the same is true for you. The Triune God chose you before the foundation of the world, He knitted you together in your mother's womb, He set you apart for Himself. All of this is said and written about you! How about that?!

Why did God set Jeremiah apart? **"I appointed you a prophet to the nations."** That is why. Surely that is a great and almost incomprehensible task. That was Jeremiah's role and responsibility. But does it remind you of anything else in the Bible?

What about this? **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations!"** (Matt 28:19) Or this one? **"Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations."** (Luke 24:47) Or what about this? **"You will be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth."** (Acts 1:8) Who was this all addressed to?

Yes, yes, it was addressed to you! It was addressed to God's own people, whom He has chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy before Him. That's you. All of this is said about every Christian. This is why we are chosen and called, for this grand and almost incomprehensible task. That's you. Let this sink in!

How did Jeremiah react when the Lord called Him? This is where we see clearly how similar we are with Jeremiah. This was His reaction: **"Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."** Sounds familiar?

How do you want to respond when you hear God's call to make disciples from all nations, to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations, to be Jesus' witnesses to the end of the earth, how do you react, what do you say? Honestly?

“Ah, Lord, truly I do not know how to speak... How can you expect this from me? I am not that type of person, I don't know enough, what if I don't know what to say? What if I say the wrong thing? What if I mess up? What if they reject me? What if I ruin my relationships? What if I look foolish and awkward? What will others think?”

Do any of these excuses seem familiar? They certainly do to me. This has been one of my great fears for years and years. What if I don't know what to say, what to answer? If you recognize any of these excuses... good, rejoice! For you are in great company!

That's exactly what Jeremiah did, that's what Isaiah did. Moses probably beats everyone else we know; he came up with one excuse after another. “I can't do this, I can't, I am nobody, they won't listen to me, I can't speak, it won't work!” It is true, we are in good company, surrounded by God's saints who wanted to avoid God's call.

That's good if you worry about those matters. That is good if you think you are not fit for such a great mission. No one is. No one has ever been. Which means that we will have to rely on our Lord and let His strength work through our weakness. And that is the Lord's intention, He only expects that we trust Him and listen to Him.

It is much worse when someone thinks that they can be God's messengers in their own strengths and wisdom. They will build the Church, they will bring revivals, they will fill the pews, they will figure it out themselves... Then we need to be concerned.

The Lord provides. He always does. Thus, He said to the young 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 [...] 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.”**

Similarly for Moses, the Lord provided everything that was missing. The same for us. He provides. We lack understanding, He provides pastors and teachers of the Church, He provides books and resources. We lack practice, He provides Bible studies where we can practice, pool our wisdom, He provides fellow saints with whom we can share.

We are fearful, He provides brothers and sisters to walk with us, to support and encourage us, and remember how He said to Jeremiah: “**Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.**” Again, does it remind you of something else in the Bible? What about this?

“**Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**” (Matt 28:20) That's Jesus' promise to His messengers, to you. That He will be with you, He will never abandon you, He will give you His Spirit and Words to speak, He will deliver you. He will.

Now, what was Jeremiah sent to do? That's interesting: “**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.**” Do you see what is so surprising in this?

The power of God's Word. It has the power to destroy kingdoms and to build them up. Kingdoms, not just individuals, kingdoms, the mightiest of human institutions. **"Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales."** (Is 40:15) The power of the Word of God is amazing.

If... If we, indeed, preach the Word of God, not our own ideas, not some watered-down versions of God's message, made tame and catered to please people instead of pleasing our Triune God. That is always our challenge, to speak what the Lord commands, even if it may cost us. It certainly cost Jeremiah. It cost him greatly.

It costed him so much that he wanted to give up his calling, but couldn't: **"If I say, "I will not mention him [the Lord God] or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot."** (Jer 20:9) His calling was burning in his heart.

Sometimes he was so exhausted that he cried out: **"Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!"** (Jeremiah 20:14) It was anything but easy for Jeremiah to remain faithful to the Lord's calling. So, if you struggle with what the Lord has called you to do, rejoice, perhaps, He is doing something great through you as well that you don't even know about.

Did you notice what the Lord commanded Jeremiah? Destroy and build up! How can we put it in different words? How do the Lutheran Church teach, what do we need to proclaim? The Law and the Gospel. Yes! That's what the Lord commanded Jeremiah.

That is what He has commanded to us: "Repentance and forgiveness should be proclaimed!" This is the task entrusted to each one of us. Of course, it is too large, too impossible for any of us, we can only do it together with and in the strength of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is exactly what He has promised us, His presence and His Spirit.

Let me ask you again, are you a prophet? We are not prophets in the same way Jeremiah or Isaiah or Moses were, for as far as I know, we do not have received particular revelations of God's plans for the future.

But as we know, God's prophets not only delivered messages about the future events, they also preached the Law, called their audience to repentance and proclaimed the Good News of our gracious Lord, His salvation! The same task, to speak God's prophetic Word is entrusted to all Christians. It is entrusted to me, and it is entrusted to each one of you. It is entrusted to the Church as her prophetic task.

May the Lord who chose you, who called you, who set you apart for Himself continue to bless you richly with His Spirit, may He use our fears to bring us to Him in prayer, may He use our doubts to drive us deeper in the Word, may He use our weakness to surround us ever closer with the cloud of fellow saints. May the message that we speak is the Lord speaking and may His Word always fulfil its purpose. Amen.