

Jeremiah 1:4-10

4 The word of the Lord came to me, saying,

5 "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."

6 "Alas, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."

7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

9 Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Luke 13:10-17 NIV

10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Message:

Jeremiah - a prophet, known as the weeping prophet, whose name means *God Will Uplift*.

We just heard the story of God coming to Jeremiah when he was just a young man, probably no more than a teenager, according to Jeremiah "the Lord came to me saying, 'I appoint you as a prophet to the nations.'"

Jeremiah was chosen by God... God told him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."

There are other stories of chosenness in the Bible. There is Abraham and Sarah; Moses and Miriam, David, Esther, Paul, and of course, Mary – and many more. God is always choosing people. Author Father Richard Rohr says that "God's chosenness is for the sake of communicating chosenness to everybody else!" God needs people – God needs those who are to be willing instruments – *for the sake of others*.

For many years, here at Maple Grove, when Bill Croy was our Senior Pastor and Laurie Clark our associate pastor, Our Hands are Christ's hands was our sort of byline. It was; Maple Grove – Our hands are Christ's hands. It was our reminder that we are needed as willing instruments for God. Whether it inspired by the Saint Teresa of Avila's (Ah vee lah) prayer *Christ Has No Body*, or not, I associate it with that and I want to read that prayer to you now...

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Saint Teresa knew we were chosen to be the body of Christ. It's in everyone's job description.

Jeremiah's particular chosenness was that of prophet, and he was appointed to "uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." And God assured him "I am with you."

Jeremiah was to serve the people of Israel, to help bring them back into right relationship with God. He called them out for breaking their covenant with God, he told them they weren't

living up to the Torah and they were living in violation of the Laws, that the most vulnerable people; the widows, orphans and immigrants – were being taken advantage. Jeremiah delivered the message of God’s judgment and warned them that they would suffer and be forced into exile.

Even with all that said, with harsh consequences before them, Old Testament scholar and theologian, Walter Bruggeman, says that being prophetic is not to be shaming, criticizing, nagging, or scolding – it is to speak of new possibilities. A prophet’s message carries with it a message of hope and grace.

Bruggeman says that prophets put visioning front and center, “they offer an alternative consciousness.” He says they are to “nurture, nourish and evoke a Yahweh consciousness.” They are sent to dismantle the dominate consciousness and to plant and raise up, an alternative one. The prophet knows, they *insist*, that society could be other than it is, better than it is.

Prophets imagine something beyond what already is. Another way of saying it is that they share God’s dream with people. Author and pastor Brian McLaren reframes the familiar phrase God’s will be done, into God’s dream come true. Jeremiah was saying to the people of Israel ... God dreams of a better life for you, God dreams of peace for you, of justice for you, of compassion, cooperation, reconciliation, and of freedom for you. God dreams of relationship with you.

When I was in college at Ohio State University, I took an art history course. During that course there was one work of art that rattled me a bit, causing me to examine my own thinking. It was a sculpture; I couldn’t locate a photo of it to tell you the name of it or the artist. But as I recall, it was made from bent and formed metal, and it was a bunk bed in what appeared to be an institutional setting and there was a figure of a person, lying on the bottom bed and there was a thought bubble above the person of what was going on in their mind as they laid there in bed. And inside the thought bubble, was the exact image of the person lying in bed. I was struck by the idea of not being able to imagine anything more than one’s current circumstances.

To be sure there are times we all are unable to see alternatives, or to imagine new possibilities for our lives and for our world. And that is when we most need prophetic imagination. Of seeing God’s dream for us.

In the Luke story we heard today, Jesus saw an alternative to what had always been when he knowingly broke the laws of the Sabbath and healed the woman who had been bent over for 18 years.

Father Richard Rohr says that the “best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better.” Jesus practiced the better when he said to the men ready to stone the women who had been caught in an act of adultery, “Let him who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.” And when against societal taboos, Jesus had a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus practiced the alternative consciousness when he entered the tax-collectors house to join him for dinner and again when he touched the leper. Jesus lived a Yahweh consciousness. One in which God uplifts.

In the 12th century Francis Bernardone walked away from a life focused on power, prestige, and possessions in order to live an alternative life, of simplicity, focused on God and in harmony with all creation as St. Francis of Assisi.

God needs people to share God’s dream, to walk the path, to show what’s possible. God needs people who will let others know that God knows us well, and God loves us, God has good plans for us, desires and dreams for us, God calls to us, God will be with us and work with us to bring about God’s good. God wants, dreams of, desires relationship with us and one another.

In chapter 29 of Jeremiah, he writes to the elders who have been carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, they have been forced from a land they treasured, it’s gone and it is not coming back and he tells them, where you are now “Build houses; plant gardens, marry seek peace, and pray for Babylonians well-being.” And he messages of comfort and assurance from God saying “I know the plans I have for you, plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.”

Explaining what today’s world has in common with the book of Jeremiah, Walter Brueggemann said, “Ours, like the time of Jeremiah, is a time of violence, it’s a time of loss, it’s a time of bewilderment, it’s a time of fear, and I think that the book of Jeremiah gives voice to all of that, and before it finishes, it also manages to give voice to hope.”

One way to help us find hope, is to be what Barbara Brown Taylor calls “detectives of Divinity.” We need imagination, to believe in the possibility of God’s dream for us. That may mean

looking out into the world for signs of Yahweh consciousness and *with* Yahweh consciousness. Like when I heard Scarlett Lewis, the mother of 6-year-old Jesse Lewis, who was killed in the Sandy Hook school shooting, speaks and writes about *Nurturing, Healing, Love* – the words her son Jesse had written on the chalkboard in their home days before he died.

Or when I read about more than 1,000 Norwegian Muslims forming a human shield they called a “ring of peace” to protect a Jewish place of worship in Oslo in the wake of a synagogue attack.

And in London, when a neighborhood watch group called ‘Shomrin’ (Hebrew for guards) protects Muslims against hate crimes.

Or when in 2017, through the support of the West Ohio Conference and Maynard Ave church, the “Welcome Home” program began and offers supportive relationships to women impacted by incarceration.

Or when I found out on Friday that Ryan Van Bibber, of our AV team, has started an organization in order to provide scholarships for Columbus city school students so they have an opportunity to participate in otherwise unaffordable educational programs.

Or even when one-night last week, while sitting at home, intently focused on my computer screen I received a text from one of our Maple Grove homeless friends, telling me to look up at the rainbow.

Being detectives of divinity, doesn’t deny real world problems. And yet, it views the world through the lens of promise, fall, redemption and resurrection. It takes the pain and brokenness, suffers with, grieves for, and rises in love and resurrects through God’s grace.

To paraphrase Bruggeman; imagination from a Christian sense, “requires great will and great intentionality and great resolve to continue to bear witness to a world that contradicts the rest of our life.”

We are all chosen is to participate in the dream of God.