

Do you remember growing up as a kid and asking a question only to be told, "I'll tell you when you are older?" It happens in my house. Evan loves to ask questions, and Audrey does too. Sometimes I have to say, "That's a great question, but we'll have to wait until you are a little bit older before I can answer it." Have y'all ever done that? **(pause for response)** We try to protect our children by saying they are too young. We try to shelter them from what might do them harm. That is not what is happening in this passage. God is telling Jeremiah, it does not matter how young you are. I have work for you to do, and you are going to do it.

Last week we talked about times when we were picked last for something. Those are times when other people told us we are nobodies. In this morning's passage Jeremiah is the one coming up with excuses. No one in this morning's passage has said anything ugly, or discouraging to Jeremiah. It is Jeremiah who says, "I am only a youth" which is one way of saying, "Don't pick me. I'm a nobody" (Jer 1:6). Jeremiah did not want to be a somebody. Jeremiah was not trying to be important, or popular, or powerful or wealthy. Jeremiah was trying to weasel his way out of something God wanted Jeremiah to do. God wanted to make Jeremiah into a Somebody; a prophet of Israel. Church, let's review. What is the job of a prophet of Israel? **(pause for response)** The job of the prophet is to deliver God's messages to God's people. Jeremiah did not want to be a prophet. Jeremiah was afraid of the people. However, God had already made Jeremiah a prophet. God knew Jeremiah before Jeremiah was formed in the womb, and consecrated Jeremiah before he was born. It was done. The die was cast, and Jeremiah was not going to get a lot of say in the matter. It's probably the closest God ever comes to taking away free will. In Jeremiah chapter 20 verse 9 Jeremiah says,

If I say, "I will not mention him,
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.

Sadly. Today there are very few who feel this way about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am going to share something with you this morning I learned the hard way in my first appointment. Pastors do not save churches. Pastors cannot save people. I cannot make you right with God. I cannot fix you. I cannot fix the problems in this church. What I can do is share with you what I have learned – largely through trial and error, about the way the grace of God works to bring about positive change in people and in congregations of God's Church.

When the grace of God is upon us we share it. We do not force it, or push it. We don't try to scare people into believing it, or coerce people into doing church the way we do it because that's the way we've always done it. When grace is upon us we do not act that way. **(pause)** Now, I am your pastor, but I am also human so I have something to confess. I have to admit this. I have behaved that way. I have lived a stretch of my life where I thought if I don't change this situation; if I don't save this church, or if I don't save this person I will be the one on God's list who is lost and punished. **(pause)** Do you know what that was? **(pause for answers)** Do you know what that was? **(pause for answers)** That was not smart. The idea I could and had to save people was both ignorant and dumb. That is not the way God acts. That is not the way God works. I cannot save anybody! None of you can save anybody! Jeremiah could not save anybody. Jeremiah was a Nobody! And guess what... so are we. We are nothing but a bunch of nobodies. God calls us to grow closer to God. God calls us to be filled with God's grace and love. God calls us to share that grace and love by the way we live and the love we share, but God has not given us the power to save anyone. Jesus Christ told us there is but one way to God the Father and that is through God the Son (John 14:6). Are you the Son of God? Are any of you the Son of God? You all know I am not the Son of God. We have to remember we are not God when we are tempted to push and shove people our way. We don't always know what is right. We are not in charge.

Sometimes God's grace works in ways we do not expect. How are we to know? Certainly God puts a message of repentance into the heart and bones of Jeremiah, but true repentance is impossible without the grace of God. The burning message God spoke through Jeremiah was to repent. Church, what does it mean to repent? **(pause and encourage responses)** Let's find out. Would the congregation please stand as you are able? **(pause while the congregation responds)** Would the congregation now turn around and face the cross. **(pause while the congregation responds)** My sisters and brothers, that, is repentance. Would the congregation on the right side please turn and face the right outside wall? **(pause while the congregation responds)** Would the congregation on the left please turn and face the left outside wall? **(pause while the congregation responds)** Would the the congregation to stand and turn to face the outside walls of the church. **(pause while the congregation stands and turns.)** On the count of three would everyone please turn around and face each other in the middle. My sisters and brothers when we turn our attention away from what we want and put God first we will find ourselves moved by grace to face one another and see the problems in others' lives instead of just focusing on our own. You may be seated.

It's hard. It is hard to tell people their behavior is selfish. As soon as we do they will point the finger at us. They will say things like, "Who are you? You're not perfect! You mess up! You make mistakes! You're not right! Who are you to judge?!" **(pause)** And they are right. If all we are doing is pointing the finger at other people's mistakes then yeah, we are acting like judgmental jerks. That's what Jeremiah was afraid of. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet of Israel living in Jerusalem during what is arguably one of the darkest hours of Israel's history. The message God put in Jeremiah's heart and bones was not the message of hope Israel and Jerusalem wanted to hear. The northern ten tribes of Israel had already been destroyed and carted off the furthest regions of the Assyrian empire in 722 BC. Now the Babylonians had come. The Babylonians had conquered the Assyrians, and now it was the Babylonian's turn to conquer the Promised Land. Where God had stopped the Assyrians, God was not going to stop the Babylonians. That was Jeremiah's message from God to God's people.

I imagine it was a lot like when we took Evan to have his adenoids taken out. Evan was scared. He did not want to take the medication to make him relax so they could wheel him back to the operating room. Evan struggled and fought. The message from Karen and I was not we will protect you from this. We will save you from this. The message was we love you, and because we love you, you are going to let this happen. Evan didn't like it. It was heartbreaking to see him cry and fight. The message we gave Evan through this procedure is we will do what is necessary to keep you safe and loved – even if it is uncomfortable at times.

We all have a message – the Message of Jesus Christ to share. We are all called to share that message in love. We are called to recognize the change that does or does not come over people is not our doing, and does not always happen on our time table. God is in charge. What we have control over is whether we will repent and put God first. We can choose how we will share God's love with those who need to hear it most. Will we be judgmental, or will we lovingly say, "This behavior is not okay?" God loves us enough to give us these choices. However, we can only make them well if we are putting God first. And nobody is too young to put God first.

Hear this chorus again, and please join in when you are comfortable.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen

'Cause I'm just a nobody trying to
tell everybody
All about Somebody who saved
my soul
Ever since You rescued me, You
gave my heart a song to sing
I'm living for the world to see
nobody but Jesus
I'm living for the world to see
nobody but Jesus

Source: LyricFind

Songwriters: Mark John Hall / Bernie Herms /
Matthew Joseph West

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