

The Word of the Lord Calls us to Service **Jeremiah 1:4-10**

The Word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. Jeremiah does not tell us how it came, how the Lord brought His Word to him. But there are many examples in the Bible of how the Word of the Lord came to people. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. Isaiah saw a vision of the Glory of God in the temple. Samuel, as a young boy, heard the voice of God calling him in the night. Elijah heard God in the still small voice on Mount Sinai. An Angel came to Mary. Paul saw a bright light that blinded him and heard Jesus speaking to him. Jeremiah does not tell us how the Word of the LORD came to him, but he knew it was the Word of the LORD.

The Word of the LORD comes to us as well, and speaks similar Words of Promise, Assurance, and Direction. We may not see angels or blinding lights, or hear talking bushes or voices in the night. But God still speaks to His people. In Baptism, the Word of the LORD, connected to the water, assures us that we are God's children, that He has placed his name upon us and we belong to Him, we are part of His family. God speaks to us through His written Word, the Bible. As we read and study His Word, He shows us that we are sinners and separated from Him, but he also shows us how much He loves us and what He has done for us in Jesus. Because of Jesus' life and death for us, we have his forgiveness and, through faith in Him, we are his children. Because of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, we have the power of Jesus through His Spirit to live as His children in this world, using the gifts and abilities that He has given us to serve and help the people around us.

When we look for direction in our lives – what school to attend, what major to study, what career to pursue, what job change to seek – do we ask questions like, “What's in it for me? How much money does it pay? Where can I get by with the least amount of work?” or do we ask the right questions, “What does God want me to do? What gifts and skills has He given me to use in service to others? What are the things I enjoy doing to help others? How can I be best equipped to use my life in helping and serving others?” The Word of the LORD comes to us to give us answers to these questions as we read and study the Scriptures.

The Word of the LORD also comes to us as God speaks through His people. God speaks through your pastor(s), your family members, other church members, your Christian friends, even through classmates at school or colleagues at work. He gives a Word of encouragement, affirmation, direction, or warning. Others can often see, more clearly than we can see ourselves, the gifts and abilities that God has given us, and how we might use them in service to God and others. Listen as God speaks to you through others.

As you earnestly seek to know and to follow God's plan for your life, and as you trust Him to show you, to place opportunities and open doors before you, consider the desires that God puts into your heart. We are not talking about the sinful desires of our human nature, but the Word of the LORD can come to you through the God-pleasing desires that He gives you. The Psalmist says: “Trust in the Lord and do good. Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:3-4)

So, the Word of the LORD does come to us today also. It assures us as it did Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I chose you and appointed you for service in My Kingdom.” God has a plan and a purpose for each of us, a plan for good, to bless us, and to bless others through us. The details may remain hidden for a time, but He will let us know as we need to know. That is where faith comes in, trusting Him to guide us.

God may choose to lead some of you to use your talents and abilities to help others grow in their faith and in their relationship with Jesus as full time church workers. There are many possibilities in church work these days. Besides Pastors and Lutheran School Teachers, there are Deaconesses, Directors of Christian Education, Directors of Christian Outreach, Directors of Family Life Ministry, Directors of Parish Music, Parish Nurses, Social Workers and Counselors, Missionaries, Chaplains, and Lay Ministers. There are opportunities to work in outdoor ministries, and with radio, television and internet ministries. God may lead you to consider these vocations or callings while you are still very young, as when He called Samuel. Or it may be as you are looking at colleges and programs of study and possible careers. Or it may be after you are already working in another vocation or career – as a second or third career.

Then, again, God may choose to use you as His servant and to use your gifts in a vocation other than full time church work. Whatever job it is that you do, or decide to do in the future, consider it as your calling from God, your vocation, your opportunity to use the gifts that God has given you to help people. And be open to the Word of the LORD leading you in new and different directions throughout your life's journey.

How do we respond to the Lord when His Word comes to us? Like Jeremiah (and Moses and other Prophets) do we make excuses for why we should not do what God seems to be directing us to do? "I don't know how to speak in front of people. I don't know how to witness about my faith. I don't know how to talk to people in trouble or distress. What would I say?" "I'm too young, too old, too sinful, too unworthy, too busy, too committed, too shy, too scared."

The Word of the LORD comes to us. God assures us that it is not about us, not about our age or ability or worthiness. It is not about us but about His grace, His Word, His ability. There is always a danger when our focus is upon ourselves, upon our hesitation or our unwillingness. There is the danger of not responding in faith, but in self-centered unbelief and pride, instead.

There is also a danger in being too eager, too willing to volunteer. We can seek service in the Kingdom for the wrong reasons. And usually when we do, it is because the focus is still on ourselves. When we want to champion our own issues, speak our own words, set up our own agendas, save the church, the focus is still on us. Sometimes pride and arrogance lead to focus on what I can do for Jesus, what I have to offer Him. The Word of the LORD comes to us at these times as well "to uproot and tear down" the pride and arrogance in our attitudes, "to destroy and overthrow" our self-centered, self-seeking motivations. It brings us to repentance and then takes the focus off of self and puts it back on Jesus where it belongs – on His Word, His agenda, His plans for us. The Word of the LORD comes to us and "plants" faith as it assures us that we are God's children. It "builds us up" and encourages us that as we go, as we speak, it is His Word and not ours.

It is all about God and His Word directing our lives, to go where He takes us, and to say what He gives us to say. He says to us, "Don't be afraid!" Why? Because nothing bad will ever happen to us? No! But because He promises to be with us, to never leave us or forsake us. It is not your word that you will speak but the Word of the LORD.

God touched Jeremiah's mouth. "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."

He promises the same to us. It may be difficult. People may not understand our motives and may choose not to listen to us. We will face dangers and even persecution. But he puts His word into our mouths and promises to be with us and to protect and deliver us.

So, we keep our focus on Jesus, on His Word. We will use the gifts and abilities He has given us to be His servant in this world, to help and encourage the people around us. And as we travel this journey through life, we go in faith, trusting Jesus, not knowing where the journey will take us, but confident that He is guiding us and His love is providing all we need, because the Word of the LORD has come to us.

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