



“The Order Is Everything”

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Scripture:

Jeremiah 1:4-10 (NRSV)

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 child.’

But the Lord said to me,
‘Do not say, “I am only a child”;
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.’

The Sermon:

Most children live in the present, in the now, reveling in this moment of play, or concentration; this moment of book or game or movie. But they also live in the future and a child can tell you that on one day they want to be a neurosurgeon (that was me, at age

10) and a week or year later, they want to be a biologist (that was me at age 13) or a farmer's wife (me at 16).

Just last week we heard our church children share some of their dreams, one of them insisting on being the pilot of the Millennium Falcon, (or a regular pilot if the other position was already filled). We had a doctor, and a musician up here on the chancel steps too, sharing their dreams.

It is not as common to hear children say: "I want to be a priest, a rabbi, a minister."

But it can be said. It is just a very strange profession, and a challenging one!

Somehow, someone is *compelled*. You don't so much choose to serve the Most High God, the Holy One, the One in Unsearchable Light, the Unmoved First Mover, the Maker of the Stars...no, you don't so much choose, as you feel pushed, urged, weighted with the possibility.

Poor Jeremiah, he felt the weight of the call, and really wanted to shift it off of his shoulders.

To speak with the voice of God, to be a prophet for the stiff-necked people of God...this would be tough.

And so it is. Read the book of Jeremiah sometime! He really had it rough.

But here, in this first chapter, even as Jeremiah swears he is too young and too unsophisticated for the job, God replies with a resounding "Do not be afraid, for I am with you".

And then, "today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

I would ask for a moment of your attention as I tell you today, No One, and

I mean No One, wants a job description like that!

Ministers of all stripes; rabbis, priests and imams, shamans and holy people want to come into the lives of others to build up, to heal, to support, to mentor, to lead into holiness and wholeness.

Yet here it is spoken: Jeremiah is called “to pluck up and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow”.

Why? O God, why that message, why that job?! Yike!

My dear people of Westminster: we live in just such a time of pulling down and overthrowing church, as we have known it.

Everywhere you look, you see the faith communities of Spokane, of the United States...in disarray. Churches closing, communities of faith shrinking, grand old buildings being sold for condos and coffee shops.

It is a time of overthrowing and of pulling down that we live in today.

And maybe we need to face that message of God through Jeremiah. The young prophetic voices say; “give me a place that isn’t a slave to the past, that isn’t hypocritical, and shallow, money grubbing, homophobic, and power hungry.”

All sorts of people look around and say: “Show me church that is safe for me and my peers, whether we are straight or gay or trans. Whether we have cool clothes and shoes, or not. Show me a place called church that is safe whether we are sad, or sick, or poor, addicted or lonely; whether we are too old or too young to be taken seriously by society”.

“Give me a place to be held when I am in pain. Where I meet compassion in the faces, and strength in the arms to hold me. Don’t judge me. Walk beside me”.

“Show me what justice looks like. Show me honesty. Show me what mercy, and love and hope look like, right now, right here”.

There is a lot of church that has to be pulled up, and torn down for a church like that to be planted. And I don’t mean a new church in a hip new building with a groovy sound and light system.

That’s just a show.

The *new church* is a place of authenticity, and heart. Of truly deep prayer and praise, whatever we say, or sing. Old or new, songs or prayers. Prayers of the heart, prayers of the people, prayers of the saints of the church from ages past. Authentic prayers. Songs of praise.

Friends of Westminster: I believe we are dedicated to building that kind of new church, and we are willing to tear away our comfortable, yet closed, ways so that the new may grow in this place, and in our hearts.

We have voted to stay here, and this is a critical time for us to stick together, and listen hard to one another as we make our decisions regarding our building and our ministries inside and outside of it. This is a time to be discerning and prayerful, and not ego full. To try to be bold and brave and able to let go, and let things fall down.

We may face some pulling up and tearing down. For Jeremiah, this will be the first act of his vocation. He shouted out against what he saw in the people around him. He shouted out God's call for tearing down systems of injustice, rooting out selfishness, cruelty, violence against the poor and the weak.

We need to look and listen, check our hearts, check our actions and intentions. And if we are stiff-necked and stubborn, selfish, or weak... then we need to listen and repent, that is, listen and turn... for the future must be different than the past. And there is this: "do not be afraid, I am with you".

Yes, like the prophet Jeremiah, we intend to be builders and planters, too.

The order of our work *together* is everything. Let us work together, in the face of pulling up and letting go, and in the promise of building and planting for our future, with God's promise of presence and courage.

Amen.