

The 4th Sunday after Epiphany: Holy Trinity Church: January 30, 2022

Jeremiah 1: 4-10: Good Words, Good thoughts, Good deeds!

Preached

By

The Rev. John E. Higginbotham+

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we all know what it's like to wake up from a frightening dream and think, "Wait a minute! Was that real?" And once we get a little more awake, we realize that it was just a dream, and we hopefully fall back to sleep. Let me tell you a story about one type of dream that is nearly universal. Can you guess what it is? Yes indeed, it's the dream of being unprepared for an academic examination. It's awful, isn't it? School children all over the world report having this dream, or I should say, this nightmare, for that is what it truly is about. Adults have this dream too. For those who want to practice law you must pass the Bar Exams. For those who want to practice medicine, must MCAT examinations. The Medical College Admission Test. It is a grueling exam to get into a good Medical School. If you want to be an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church, after college, graduate school for

3 years of seminary, then you must take a series of examinations called the GOEs, The General Ordination Examinations testing seven categories over one week. Candidates must pass these 7 areas before ordination to the diaconate and then priesthood, God willing. In my nightmare, every night, I never showed up for the examinations. For me, these exam dreams were never about the examinations. I discovered that these dreams were my brain's way of reassuring me that I have faced this challenge before, did well and could do it again. I suspect, I'm not the only one who panics at the thought of facing a big challenge unprepared. This morning, it helps us relate to the situation of the prophet Jeremiah the prophet in our Scripture lesson for today.

Jeremiah was a young priest in a small settlement near Jerusalem when God spoke to him one day and called upon him to be a prophet to the nations. Nothing scary about that, is there? Don't kid yourself. It's funny, but I've often said, and I've heard others say, "If God would just speak to me! If God would just tell me what I should do with my life, it would be so much easier." We all think that if God spoke to us in a clear and unmistakable way, we would feel instant relief, and would obey instantly. But look at all the people God spoke to in the Bible. Very few responded with, "Sounds great, God! I'm on it, God! I am ready to go! Thanks for the clear directions." Almost every

person responded with fear, questions and excuses. So, let's not kid ourselves that we are so faithful or courageous to respond when God calls us to fulfill His purposes. Jeremiah responds like we probably would, "Alas, Sovereign Lord." Translation, which is another way of saying "Oh no!" "I don't know how to speak; I'm too young." Which seems like a reasonable excuse to us. "No, thank You, Lord. I'm not ready. I'm sure God You meant to give this job to someone else."

My sisters and brothers, Jeremiah wasn't exactly complaining. He just wasn't listening. All Jeremiah heard was the responsibility. He didn't hear the reassurance. God never gives a responsibility without first giving reassurance. God never calls someone without first comforting them. God never appoints someone without first anointing them. Look at God's words in the beginning of this passage: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart . . ."

I hope you hear these words too just as Jeremiah did and plant them in your heart and mind. Because your life will never have the impact God created you for unless you understand this truth: God made you for a purpose. That's the first truth we need to understand from Jeremiah's story. God made you for a purpose. In fact, when God tells Jeremiah ". . . before you were born I set you

apart,” the word used here literally means “set apart for a sacred purpose” or “consecrated.” You weren’t just made for a purpose. You were made for a *sacred* purpose. For God’s purposes. I want you to do possibility thinking. Think about developed thinking such a positive, optimistic outlook on life. A *developed thinking creating an attitude through every morning and pray, “Dear Lord, lead me to the person you want me to speak to through my life today.*

Amen.” Then, when you awake in the morning and throughout the day, pray this little mantra, “God, give me good words, good thoughts, good deeds.”

This is a beautiful prayer. “Dear Lord, lead me to the person you want me to speak to through my life today.” How could such a simple prayer change your whole outlook on life? Try this little prayer on, can caused you to see the people around you as opportunities for God’s many blessings. Because of this prayer, every interaction becomes an opportunity for God to speak through you. Don’t misunderstand. I didn’t assume I had all the answers. But the burden wasn’t on me. Take on a developed thinking morning attitude assumed in the morning attitude that if you would do your part, God would work through you to bring some truth or love or mercy into that person’s life.

Think about it. What would change about your life if you viewed every moment as a limitless opportunity to live for God? What would those

moments look like if you knew God was working through you to change people's lives?

In St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 2:10 in the New Testament tells us, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which were prepared in advance for us to do." Prepared in advance. God not only created us for good works, God prepared those good works for us in advance. God didn't just make you for a purpose, God made you with a plan in mind. God made you for specific good works that were prepared *in advance* for you to do. There is nothing random or meaningless about your life. Every moment was created for God's sacred purposes. That's the first thing we need to understand from today's Old Testament from Jeremiah. I have told you very often that our faith is so simple. Here it is in a nutshell. This mantra should be on your lips as you wake in the morning: Throughout your day, **GOOD WORDS, GOOD THOUGHTS, GOOD DEEDS.** Simple as that.

The second thing we need to understand from this scripture of Jeremiah is that, to accomplish God's purposes, we must live without fear. Think what you could accomplish if you could live without fear. How many opportunities are lost to fear, particularly the fear of rejection? Personally, I've never heard of anyone dying because of rejection. How many blessings wither and die in

the face of our excuses? Fear shrinks our vision. Fear stunts our potential.

Fear steals our eternal impact. How? By making us doubt God's calling.

Listen to God's words again: "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and to deliver you, to rescue you," says the Lord. Repeat to yourself three times a day or 30 times a day, "I will not be afraid for God is with me and will rescue me." Then see what opportunities God opens for you. "You can do it. And you must do it." Good words. Good thoughts. Good deeds.

How many lives have been changed, how many lives will be changed because you challenged with your heartfelt words, "You can do it. And you must do it." To accomplish God's purposes for you, we must live without fear.

And the final thing we need to understand from the story of Jeremiah is that, to accomplish God's purposes, we must trust God's plan. Doing great things for God begins with simple trust that the One who has called us will not forsake us as we seek to follow His call.

My dear brothers and sisters, I digress here. I am a big fan of the New England Patriots. Liz and I are great fans of 44-year-old Tampa Buccaneer Quarter Back Tom Brady. Last Sunday, Liz and I were watching Tom Brady, and the Bucks We were routing and screaming for the Tampa Buccaneers. I do this rarely, but I couldn't help comparing God's arm with

professional quarterback Tom Brady's arm. And no, God did not say Brady can walk on water, though I'm sure some of his fans think he can. Writing this sermon, I couldn't help to think that God loves throwing those lead passes to all of us. Do we have any football fans here this evening/morning? So, what does that mean? "God loves throwing lead passes. Let me explain. That a lead pass in football is when the quarterback throws a long pass not to where the receiver is, but to where a receiver is going. For a lead pass to work, the receiver runs ahead of the ball being thrown and trusts that the quarterback is going to throw it to just the right spot. With God, when you follow God's principles, the results are almost always delayed. As in, when God asks you and me to do something, we rarely see the results of it immediately. We must keep doing what we know God tells us to do (running) and trusting that God will get us the results (catching the ball) somewhere downfield. If I were playing catch with NFL quarterback Tom Brady and he said, 'Just start running and the ball will be there when you get there,' I would trust him. Brady has 7 Super Bowl rings that prove he can sufficiently get the ball to a receiver downfield.

So, my sisters and brothers, how much more can we trust God when He says, just start running. I'll take care of the rest? Whatever you are trusting God for today, just keep running, and trust that God has got it all worked out.

That's what Jeremiah learned to do. God didn't choose Jeremiah because of his outstanding skills and charisma. Look at the final verses from today's scripture of Jeremiah: *"Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*

God's plan is not about you. It's not about me. It's about God working through us. As the Lord said to Jeremiah, *"I have put my words in your mouth."* But God gives us a choice. What we give to God, God will use us for God's purposes. So, just what would happen if you gave everything to God?

My sisters and brothers, here is our challenge for this week. God made you for a sacred purpose. You can't un-hear that truth. Every moment you are alive is a sacred opportunity to do good works that God prepared in advance for you to do. The only obstacle standing between you and God's sacred purpose is your willingness.

I ask you, will you give every part of your life to God? Will you refuse to let fear shrink your vision? If so, God can use you to bring hope and salvation to people who might never meet God any other way. Decide today to trust everything to God's purposes, and God will use you to make an eternal impact

in others' lives. Then see what opportunities God opens for you. "You can do it. And you must do it." Remember, Good words. Good thoughts. Good deeds. AMEN.