

Natalie W. Bell
August 21, 2022

Called
Jeremiah 1:4-10

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,

⁵ *“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.”*

⁶ *Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a
boy.”* ⁷ *But the Lord said to me,*

*“**Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;**
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.*

⁸ *Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”*

⁹ *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.*

¹⁰ *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.”*

In 2002, a teenager named ***William Kamkwamba of Wimbe
in Malawi, Africa***, was suffering during a drought and famine.
His family members were each eating one scoop of nsima per day,
shared out of a small pot.
Day after day he watched his friends and relatives grow weaker,
and many died of hunger and disease.
He was not able to go past 8th grade,
because his family could not afford the school fees.

William spent his time farming,
But also taking apart radios, playing with batteries,
and studying books on science and technology,
learning all he could about electricity.
And one day, he read about the power of ***windmills***.

That was a turning point.

This determined teenager, using scrap metal, tractor parts, and a bicycle, ***made a
windmill that brought electricity to his family compound.***

It powered a water pump to irrigate the farm,
 helping them to battle the drought and famine.
 He then built a solar-powered water pump to supply drinking water
 to his entire village!

William went on to *pursue his education* in Johannesburg.
 And eventually Dartmouth in the United States.
 He founded the Moving Windmills Project in 2008,
 which supports rural economic development in Malawi.
 It's motto is "*African Solutions to African Problems*".

William not only changed lives around him,
 he inspired the entire world with his determination and creativity.
 His story is told in the wonderful book entitled,
"The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind",
 It is also now a heartwarming Netflix movie.
 William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, Puffin: New York, 2015.

I have Malawian friends,
 And I've worked to raise money for clean water there,
 so reading his story is like cheering for a best friend!

These are the stories that *movies are made of*—
 ordinary people doing extraordinary things.
 People who are *called to make a difference* in the world.

The prophet Jeremiah was like William.
 He was called by God to be a prophet,
 during a *difficult time* in the history of God's people,
 as they were torn from their homeland and exiled to Babylon.

***At first, he thought he couldn't do it,
 he didn't think he had the skills, he said, "I'm too young!"***
 And all of those excuses are so familiar in the Bible--
 Remember ***Moses***? He was a murderer, who ran away from Egypt.
 And he had a huge stuttering problem!
 When God called him to lead the people out of Egypt, he said, who me? No way!

Even ***William*** had his doubts about understanding electricity,
 especially when his father couldn't send him to school anymore.

But what if God always works in crazy ways?
 Like *when we have doubts* about our calling--
 Isn't that when God's power really shines through our lives?

We sure see that in the Bible!
 When we feel ill equipped for our calling,
 That's when *we must rely upon the power of God in us.*
It's really not about us---it's about Jesus in us!

In **2 Corinthians 12:9** God says to Paul,
'my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'

What does that *mean to you*?
 Do you believe that God can do things through you—beyond what you think possible?

Here's the truth—God does not call people who are already equipped,
God equips those who are called!
 Here's a great quote I read in *Christian Century*, by Craig Keneer:
*God rarely calls us to do what we can do on our own—
 we do not need a call for that.
 God calls us to what is impossible on our own, so we learn to depend on him!*
Craig S. Keneer, July 26, 2022, The Christian Century

Have you ever felt like what God is asking you to do is impossible?
 I can think of different times in life...like 2021 when I was called here!

That's the thing-- *God uses ordinary people like us*—
 To do God's work in this world...
even when, especially when, We have our doubts!
 When we say—*I'm too old, too young, too shy, too busy!*
 That's exactly when God steps in and starts moving in our lives!

So does this mean we are ALL called like Jeremiah?
 That we should identify with people like him?
 Or Moses? Or Isaiah? Or Elijah?
 Or William, from Malawi?
Not many of us are appointed a prophet,
 or called to free a people,

or even to bring water to our city, right?

So how does this story relate to us?

Where are we in the story?

Well, what if we are right in the middle of it?

God knows us too, from before we are even born.

Ever read Psalm 139? Try looking that up today.

It reminds us that none of us is an accident.

We each have purpose,

and God knows that before we are even born!

And remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12?

That as ***members of the body*** of Christ,

we each have a part to play in the body,

we are each an ear or an eye, a hand or a foot—

What are you?

Now that Jesus has been resurrected,

We are ***called to be his body on earth.***

To be Jesus Christ to others!

St. Teresa of Avila said it so well:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,

No hands and feet but yours, yours are the eyes, the ears, the mouth of God.

Do you ever think about that?

That you are Jesus to other people in this world?

It's a wild and crazy calling, isn't it?

But it's not about us --

It's about ***Christ in us.***

And it doesn't have to be a big grand call—sometimes it's the small things!

But whether it's big or small,

It can be scary, to be called by God, right?

If you put yourself out there, people can react to you in different ways!

I believe this is why God said to Jeremiah,

⁸*Do not be afraid of them,*

for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord."

Don't we all need to hear that?

So, where are you sent, today?

If you're not sure, ask yourself this:

Where is my *sphere of influence*?

Who is watching me? Looking up to me?

Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor **Viktor Frankl** once said:

Everyone has a specific vocation or mission in life;

everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein

he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated,

thus, everyone's task is unique. (from *Man's Search for Meaning*)

What if God's words to Jeremiah—are words for US--today?

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,

and before you were born I consecrated you;.....

⁸*Do not be afraid of them,*

for I am with you to deliver you,

says the Lord."

What if we too are called to do what God asks us of us—in our daily lives?

Have you ever felt a ***nudge***---when God puts a person on your heart,

and you think—I've got to reach out to them, I need to pray for them?

Have you ever been ***driving*** one way, and God told you to go another?

Have you ever been ***shopping***,

and God urges you to buy something for someone else?

What if following God's call is sometimes ***small and simple*** to us,

But life changing to other people?

What if God wants to use us to ***answer*** someone else's prayers?

I believe God does that all the time---***all the time!***

In the Book of Exodus, ***two midwives for Hebrew women,***

named Shiprah and Puah, they felt God calling them to go against the order of the Pharaoh, who decreed that every Hebrew baby boy be killed.

Instead, they saved those babies.

Talk about life-changing!

What is God asking you to do today?

Where is your influence—

It's right where we live, and work, where we shop and play,

in our homes and in our neighborhoods.

Whose lives are you touching?

Is it a Spouse? Kids? Extended family? Work colleagues?

Clients? Friends? Neighbors?

What about your hairdresser or barber?

Your postal carrier? Your teachers?

Your friends here at church?

In the classic film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, **George Bailey** considers ending his life after falling upon hard times...and an angel named Clarence comes to help him reconsider by showing him just how much his life is intertwined with others.

"Strange, isn't it, George? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?"

I believe there are *lives that ONLY we can touch*, you know?

No matter who you are, *there's no substitute for YOU!*

It's tempting to say to God....SOMEONE ELSE can do that!

But that NEVER flies with God!

God says the same thing to us as God said to Jeremiah!

I chose you, I called you, I appointed you....and I'll help you!

You and I—are the people God wants to use!

And it *doesn't matter our abilities, or disabilities--*

Everyone touches lives, right?

I believe some of the most humble and simple people are making the biggest difference in the world!

Being called and used by God---is really different from the way our world works.

We say to kids---You can be *anything* you want to be!

Just work hard, and set your mind to it!

But is that true?

I mean, you can't really be ANYTHING you want to be, right?

I mean, I cannot be a concert pianist,

A long-distance runner, or a basketball star---*no matter how hard I try!*

I can set my mind to being an Olympic athlete, and

It's ***never going to happen!***

Why?

Because those are not my God-given skills or abilities!

God didn't set me apart for that.

But God DOES have a special job for me---just like God has for you!

And my self-worth does NOT come from successfully doing what I 'set my mind' to do!

Yet, that's what we tell people!

And it's not true.

What's true is that we are children of God,

And our REAL self-worth comes from being children of God.

And as children of God, *we have a mission* to be who God calls us to be,
Who God made us to be!

Which is great news, when you think about it!

It's might even be a relief!

We CANNOT be anything we want to be,

But we can be EVERYTHING God wants us to be!

Rev. Rodney Buchanan reminds us that the world works differently:

The American culture places extreme value on...youth, beauty, athletic ability, intelligence, education, wealth, and fame.

But what happens when you lose it? ...Where do you get feelings of esteem and personal worth, when everything on which you have based your value has vanished? Rev. Rodney Buchanan, Sept 1, 2009 sermon, "Healthy Self-Esteem"

Friends, the ***REAL view of ourselves,***
should come from ***GOD'S view of us!***

And God *loves* us

has called us,

And ***set us apart*** for this time, and our own purposes!

We are called to make a ***difference***—right where we are.

There is ***no substitute for YOU.***

So, what if we prayed this:

God give me the courage to BE who I am called to be!

Isn't this what ***Paul means in Philippians 4:13***, when he says,
I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me?

And in **Philippians 1:6** when he says:

⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ?

God calls us,

If we have the eyes and ears to receive it.

It's not about us.

It's about Jesus at work in us.

Later in the book of **Jeremiah, chapter 29:11**

God says: *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*

You know, *in our Luke 13 reading today, Jesus heals a crippled woman.*

She may have given up hope, after being crippled for 18 years!

But Jesus sees her—and he calls her over in the synagogue, on the Sabbath,

And says to her: *“Woman, you are set free from your ailment.”* ¹³ *When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.*

Sometimes our calling begins with being SET FREE,

From whatever is holding us down, or back.

From whatever destructive habits or beliefs we have, you know?

Sometimes, we are our own worst enemies,

And Jesus---wants to set us FREE from that!

So we can do what God calls us to do!

Friends, hear the Good News of our Gospel today!

You are custom made for YOUR mission in this world,

It doesn't matter who you are, or where you've been,

God has a calling on your life, and plans just for you.

Wherever you *are*, ***God is with you.***

The ***Holy Spirit*** is inside of you,

And ***Jesus*** wants to work through you.

May God give ALL of us the courage

to believe and follow that call,

And for that Good News, all God's people said, Amen.