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***Called***  
***Jeremiah 1:4-10***

*Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,*

<sup>5</sup> *“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.”*

<sup>6</sup> *Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”* <sup>7</sup> *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.*

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

<sup>9</sup> *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.*

<sup>10</sup> *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.”*

***I wonder when YOU have felt CALLED by God?***

And did you feel equipped for that calling,  
or lacking in some way?

***Have you ever felt a HOLY NUDGE to do something?***

***I remember talking to a woman about teaching Sunday school,  
and she said, I’ve never done that—how could I?***

But later, after our conversation, she came back and said—  
you know, God really urged me to do this, so I want to learn and help!  
And she was mentored by another teacher,  
and ended up doing a fantastic job in a very vital and rewarding ministry!

***When I went to Princeton seminary,***  
my plan was to get my MSW from Rutgers  
and become a social worker or hospital chaplain.  
Until my preaching professor suggested I do otherwise.  
He suggested that I consider pastoral ministry, and preaching.  
And I said no thank you....but then... I felt God’s call to do just that.

Talk about messing up my plans!  
But God gave me the training, and the support,  
to go into church ministry.

***I felt a nudge in 2024 to go on the pilgrimage to Iona, Scotland***  
with my spiritual director and a group of people, most of whom I had never met.  
But I never thought it was possible financially.  
Then this church celebrated my 25<sup>th</sup> year of ministry with generosity,  
And then Ed was able to go by the generosity of family...  
And what a gift it was!  
I learned so much—about Christianity,  
about our own Presbyterian tradition,  
and about taking time to rest and recharge in a ‘thin place’!

***Jeremiah felt called by God for a specific purpose—  
to speak the Word of God as a PROPHET.***  
And like most people called by God, he said—I can’t do it.  
I’m too young.  
I don’t know what to say.

***I wonder, does that sound familiar to you?***  
Have you ever told God, NO? I can’t do that!  
Have you ever had EXCUSES for God?

***If you have, you’re in good company.***  
People in the Bible called by God USUALLY say the same thing:  
no, I can’t, I don’t have the ability.  
But, then God reaffirms the calling,  
And then finally the person feels they can go forward.

***Moses*** was like this when God told him to go and talk to Pharaoh.  
He said, I stutter, I can barely speak.  
***Isaiah*** protested his call.  
***Samuel*** didn’t even realize it was God calling his name in the night.

***In fact, God calling unlikely people is an actual THEME in the Bible.***  
God called Saul, from an unknown tribe.  
David was the youngest son of Jesse.  
Paul was a persecutor of Christians!  
And Jesus was from Nazareth....a backwater rural town.

So when we feel like we're not equipped, we're in good company!

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

I wonder, what does that *mean to YOU*?  
 Do you believe that God can do things through you—  
 beyond what YOU think possible?  
 Beyond what skills you have?  
 Because that's what God is saying.

Here's the truth—God does not call people who are already equipped,  
***God equips those who are called!***  
 There was a great quote 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*

Did you hear that?  
***God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called!***  
 And we must *accept* the call, in order to be of service to God.  
 It doesn't do any good for us to hear from God,  
 if we are not going to obey and follow it.  
 Humility is essential, ***but so is COURAGE.***  
 Elizabeth C. Larocca-Pitts, *Connections*, Year C, Vol. 3, pg. 252.

***So, does this mean following God is all about OUR COURAGE?***  
 About our strength?  
 No.  
***The truth is, it's not about US at all.***

Most people called by God feel inadequate,  
***And maybe THAT'S THE POINT!***

Scott Hoezee, in his commentary, says:  
*It is as though one biblical figure after the next says, "I'm not qualified,"  
 to which God then replies, "**Who ever said you were!?**"  
***I am well aware of your INABILITY to do this work.****

***It all depends on ME in the first place***

*and if I give you what you need, then you are going to be clean out of excuses for not doing what I myself am empowering you to do.*

*The power is mine,*

*the message is mine, and the instructions you receive all along the way will be mine.*

*So let's stop talking about YOU*

*and start focusing on ME and then we'll go from there!"*

Scott Hoezee, [cepreaching.org](http://cepreaching.org), August 21, 2022

***Now, that sounds a little tongue-in-cheek,***

***But it's really TRUE.***

Every holy nudge, every calling, is about **God's work.**

**God's claim.**

And **God's mission** in this world.

**Not about US.**

***But think about that in today's society.***

Think about how **COUNTERCULTURAL** that is!

People in our society want to make **A NAME for themselves---**

just think of how many times you see a person called

"The First", "The Best", "The G.O.A.T., The Greatest of all Time"

Or how many books you've seen with the little header that says

*'New York Times bestselling author'.*

Think about celebrities being referred to as *'Oscar nominated,*

*or 'Tony-award winning' or 'Golden Globe winner' so and so...*

***It's particularly obvious right now, with social media and influencers,***

but this drive to make a name for oneself has been around since time began.

Some say that mid-century actress Helen Hayes,

who was known as *'The First Lady of American Theatre',*

actually gave a reporter the idea for that title!

Scott Hoezee, [cepreaching.org](http://cepreaching.org), 8/21/22.

***We want a name for ourselves,***

but God wants us to make a name for **truth, and goodness, justice and mercy.**

We want a name for ourselves,

***and Jesus wants us to make a name for HIM.***

In fact, in our Gospel lesson today Jesus says:  
*If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves  
 and **take up their cross daily and follow me.***

***In other words, God's call is not easy---***

Like taking up a cross.

***And, it's ALL ABOUT JESUS***—we are called to take up our cross—  
 so that we can ***FOLLOW Jesus.***

Living as Christ-followers ***is NOT ABOUT US***—  
 it's about God's mission, about the kingdom of God.

We are just instruments.

We are just God's kids,

***GOD IS GOD, and we are not.***

For Jeremiah, his calling was about something bigger than himself—  
***because it was FROM GOD.***

And it started even before his birth!

God says to Jeremiah:

*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."*

Talk about not calling the equipped!

***Jeremiah was called before he could even respond!***

This is similar to something that Eugene Peterson wrote in his book,  
*Run with the Horses:*

Peterson said that ***we are known before we know,***  
*and we enter a world we didn't create,*  
*and a life already provided for us.*

He said, *we are living in the middle of a story  
 that was started and concluded by another, by God.*

Eugene Peterson, *Run With the Horses*, pg. 89,  
 quoted by Kathryn Schifferdecker, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), 8-25-19.

***Isn't this true of ALL of us?***

Aren't we known by God, before we even know who God is?

***And, we are all called to particular times and places.***

***We all have a certain sphere of influence.***

Just think about the people around YOU—

the people who watch you, look up to you, pay attention to you.

And sometimes we don't even know who they are!

Which is why it's so important to be Christ-like at all times.

***Jeremiah was called to a particular time and season.***

And a particular sphere of influence.

He was called to preach and warn the Southern Kingdom of Judah about their coming exile at the hands of Babylon.

His calling was dangerous,

because he was holding people to account for their bad actions.

We are not called to preach in a time of exile,

But we are called during a particularly tumultuous time in our world.

And even if we are not focused on the troubles of our world,

What about the troubles of our community, or our own families?

***Aren't we ALL called into some kind of challenging situation?***

***Jeremiah's life was NOT EASY.***

His message of warning and doom did not make him popular.

He didn't win any friends with it.

In fact, God says to him:

***"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."***

***Jeremiah's message from God was largely about warning,***

And what would happen to punish God's people

for turning away from justice and mercy.

Only later did Jeremiah get to preach about building and planting, restoration and hope.

***As a result, Jeremiah suffered.***

He was put into stocks, thrown into a pit, mocked, and derided.

Some people even called for his death!

Jeremiah's life was challenging the way Moses' life was,

when he preached against Pharaoh.

The way Paul's was as he traveled and preached the Good News,

but was shipwrecked, imprisoned and ridiculed all along the way.

The way Jesus' life was difficult as an itinerant preacher,  
and finally, as our Savior, going to cross for us.

***Following the call of God isn't easy.***

***And we often want to quit.***

***Later, Jeremiah tries to QUIT.***

He's tired of preaching and warning all of the people who aren't listening.

And in Jeremiah 20:9 he says:

*If I say, "I will not mention him  
or speak any more in his name,"*

*then within me there is something like a burning fire  
shut up in my bones;*

***I am weary with holding it in,  
and I cannot.***

***In other words, he TRIES to quit,***

***but God's call on his life is so strong,***

That to deny it is to be consumed by fire from the inside.

So no matter the cost, he must speak and follow God.

***After this lament in Jeremiah 20,***

He admits that he is never alone,

The Lord is with him ***like a mighty warrior.***

God has been, and will be faithful.

***I wonder when you have wanted to give up?***

Have you ever wanted to ***just quit?***

To ***stop doing*** what God asked you to do?

I know I have.

***In this story of Jeremiah—we find both the CHALLENGE of discipleship,***

***And the JOY of it.***

We see the ***pain, and the fulfillment*** in following God's call.

Just like we heard in Luke 9 from Jesus:

*For those who want to save their life will lose it,*

***and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.***

Kathryn Schifferdecker writes in Working Preacher:

***"The life we find in following God's call is the life worth living.***

***To become the people God calls us to be is to become really and truly human"***

I want to know, *where are YOU finding a life worth living?*  
Where are *YOU finding the way to become really and truly human?*

*How is God calling you, TODAY?*

And how are you responding?

Do you realize that God will *equip* you?

Because God has a *purpose* for you?

And God is always *with* you?

When we feel like we are not equipped,

That's when *we must rely upon the power of God in us.*

*Because it's NOT ABOUT US---it's about Christ in us!*

*When God calls, may we listen and follow.*

And for the calling, all God's people can say together, Amen.