

“Resistance to the Call”

Jeremiah 1:4-10
Richard C. Allen
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South Glastonbury
Connecticut

Jeremiah is so loveable because he's so bloomin' human. Most everyone can relate to him. God gets his attention; calls him into service; places a mission in his hands. Jeremiah's response: 'WHO, ME? You've got to be kidding! Maybe you haven't noticed. I'm only a youth! What do you expect from me? I don't even have my driver's license yet!'

Jeremiah stands out as a symbol of resistance, a symbol of all the excuses we come up with to excuse ourselves from being available to doing God's work in the world. Jeremiah said, "I'm only a youth." If he were alive today, he might say, 'I have a soccer tournament.' Or, 'I have a business meeting.' Or 'that doesn't fit my skill sets.' Or, 'I've already done my part.' Jeremiah is the quintessential resister to God's calling. If you have ever served on a church nominating committee, you are all too familiar with Jeremiah!

But the thing is: God is persuasive and persistent. God replied to Jeremiah's resistance saying: "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. Don't be afraid. I am with you." We see here a wonderful revelation of God's nature. God calls and equips and persists and accompanies. God accomplishes great things through ordinary people such as Jeremiah, such as you and I.

As I read the text for this morning from Jeremiah, I am drawn instantly to the youth of our own church family. For nearly three decades now I have watched our youth respond to God's call to mission and ministry. I have watched them head off to a Habitat for Humanity work site and return with stories of having encountered God. They also return with new skill sets, ready to re-side their own homes, ready to put a new roof on the High Street School, ready to sheetrock their basements! But mostly, they come back alive to what it means to be doing God's work in the world.

I've watched younger, Middle School youth head off to Boston and New York City and Providence to do soup kitchen ministries. Boys and girls who have never entered their own kitchens at home chop vegetables and meats that become a homeless woman's stew. They play checkers at drop-in centers where homeless men yearn for community. They spend a day making 300 sandwiches which are then delivered to people living with the HIV virus. Sometimes I do more than watch them; sometimes I go with them. They are the Jeremiah's of today. They could each name 100 other places they could be, 200 other activities they could be pursuing back in Glastonbury; but they have overcome their resistance and have said YES to doing God's work in the world!

When our teenagers feel that sacred nudge and head off into the wilderness of homelessness, trusting that the God who called them will also sustain them and go with them, they instantly become the leaven in the loaf of bread we call church. They add a certain effervescence, an expanding, bubbling force in our midst. They are the yeast. They are, of course, not the only leaven in the loaf. We see the same liveliness in many other sectors of church life! But today the focus is on youth! Jeremiah was only a youth!

7th through 12th graders have spent the last 24 hours out on the front lawn of the church, holding up signs, waving, drawing the community's attention to the plight of the homeless. They have collected warm clothing, winter coats, and cash. They have had a taste of being cold and have huddled by a burn barrel. They have imagined not knowing where the next meal will come from. It's a ministry that none of them really wants to do, but everyone of them feels compelled to do. It's a Jeremiah sort of ministry.

I can still hear one of my own sons 25 years ago saying, "But dad, I'm only 15, why do I have to take the midnight shift?" And I heard that same son last week tell me how great it is that South Church is still doing the Sleep Out, how great it is that South Church is now about to settle a refugee family. Over the years, he has connected the dots. He has seen how his own four hour shift from 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. at the homeless sleep out has forever colored his understanding of what it means to be a neighbor. Monday through Friday he is a professor of Economics. But on Saturdays he is a volunteer with the Lexington Habitat for Humanity affiliate.

He is grateful for the Carlsons, Nils and Helen, who were his Confirmation sponsors. He is grateful for this church's emphasis on youth involvement. His is but one story among thousands of stories, stories of youth, who, like Jeremiah, had to overcome some initial resistance to getting involved in the mission of the church; but once involved found meaning and value, and there was no turning back.

In a way, Jeremiah is everyone; he is every man; he is every woman. He knows God has a claim on his life, a use for his time and talent; but there is this resistance to getting involved; this resistance to taking the plunge into what I call the trenches of discipleship.

The irony is that it's down there in the trenches of discipleship where we make the discoveries that matter, where we find out who we are and to whom we belong; where we discover why it was that those first disciples chose to leave their nets behind and to follow the Christ into the heart of humanity. So I end this sermon with a Biblical plea: Do not say, "I am only a youth." Say, "Here am I; send me." In the greatest of hope, Amen!