

SUMMONED

A SERMON FOR BAPTISM AND COMMUNION
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2013
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
TED W. LAND, INTERIM PASTOR

JEREMIAH 1:4-10
LUKE 4:21-30

Have you ever been summoned? I have. I have been summoned to jury duty several times, though I've never had the privilege of actually serving on a jury. I've even been summoned to court as a witness a time or two, usually as a character witness for a church member, but once or twice to attest to something I had seen either in a traffic accident or a crime.

When God summons us, it is something else again.

Our Old Testament lesson this morning is the call of Jeremiah, when God summoned Jeremiah to be a prophet. Like Moses, and like Jonah, and indeed like a lot of people God calls, Jeremiah resisted, made excuses.

First, he says, "I'm too young. I am but a lad, just a kid." And God says, "You will go where I send you and speak what I tell you to."

God anticipates Jeremiah's next protest, which would have been, "But I don't know what to say!" God put his hand on Jeremiah's mouth, touched his lips, and said, "Now I have put my words in your mouth..."

Now I want to say something about the first words of this call: 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."

Sometimes, I see only the first phrase of this passage quoted. And that is all right as far as it goes. I suspect that God did know every baby ever born before it was formed in the womb, but this is a special statement related to the prophet Jeremiah. It is making the point that God consecrated him and appointed him to be a prophet to the nations before he was even born.

Jeremiah may have been the greatest of the prophets. I know the Israelites gave that honor to Elijah, and that's all right, but Jeremiah is right up there with Elijah, and the two of them are head and shoulders over the rest.

Jeremiah was called, summoned, not just to speak the word of the Lord to Israel, or to the land of Judah, as were other prophets. He was called to speak the word of the Lord to Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt.

Jeremiah is often portrayed as a prophet of doom and judgment, and indeed he was, for he foretold the consequences of Judah's apostasy and heresy, when God's people

abandoned God's ways, and worshipped the false gods and the riches and powers of the great nations that surrounded them.

When last seen, Jeremiah was on the road, a prisoner or a hostage, being taken to the land of Egypt.

But Jeremiah is also the prophet who told of God's New Covenant, and of God's new law, written on the hearts of human beings, God's law of love.

Jeremiah suffered for speaking the truth, for preaching and proclaiming the word of God.

Speaking God's word, speaking the truth is not without risks. In our New Testament lesson today, we saw how the crowd turned on Jesus, and was ready to cast Him off a cliff because He had told the truth, spoken the word of the Lord, and the people were not ready to hear it or accept it.

So, I suppose, it would have been easier for Jeremiah or Jesus to keep quiet, to shut up, to keep God's word in their hearts.

But when God summoned Jeremiah to speak, he could do no other.

I often pray before I preach the prayer from scripture that says, "Lord, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

Most of the time, I don't write out my prayers, and I often wonder where the words I pray come from. Well, I don't wonder where they come from, I am in awe and wonder that God can put words of hope, comfort, love, grace, in my mouth, and I can utter them.

God summoned me when I was a teenager, called me to the ministry, called me to preach, to pray, to pastor.

But I've come to understand that God summons people in different ways, in different times, for different purposes.

We know next to nothing about the lives of the ones God summoned in the Old Testament, the prophets. We know that Amos was a farmer, and we know that Jeremiah was just a lad, and we know that Jonah tried to run away, but when God summoned, they heeded the call. They could not resist it. And then, when their work is done, they fade into history.

I think God summons ordinary, everyday people to do His work and His will, and to speak His words, in extraordinary times. God summons people for service not because of who they are but because of who God is.

As Will Willimon has put it, "God calls ordinary people to do extraordinary work for God."

Karl Barth, the 20th century theologian, stated that the essence of our humanity lies not in our reason, or our emotions, but rather in our being creatures who have been addressed, summoned, called forth by God.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Barth would have said that the uncalled, unsummoned life, the life not addressed by or to God, is not worth living.

Today, Jacob Stafford begins his life as one who will be called, summoned, addressed by God. When we come to the table, we renew our relationship with Jesus Christ, who has called, summoned, addressed, us. Who knows what great thing God might yet have in store for us to do, as we are summoned to do the work of the kingdom of God on earth.

Let us pray:

Sovereign God you choose us to participate in your holy ministry. Your call upon our life is a great gift. It comes, not because we have what it takes, but because you give us what is needed. You call, not because we are great, but because you are God.

Like Jeremiah, we know that we do not know what to say or what to do. Provide the words we need, show us where we should go and what we should do, and help us to respond when we are summoned, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.