

"Calling Plan"

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Old Testament Lesson – Jeremiah 1:4-10 New Testament Lesson - 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 12

A certain public library has developed a system called Dial-A-Tale. "Anytime a young child wants to hear a fairy tale, he can call the number and a voice comes on reading a short fairy tale to the listening young ear. However, the number is only one digit different from Rev. Tom Erickson's. Because ... small fingers often make a mistake, Tom gets frequent calls from a child listening for a fairy tale.

After several unsuccessful attempts to explain a wrong number to the small child, Tom felt he had only one alternative. He obtained a copy of Three Little Pigs, and set it by the phone ..." Pastor Tom didn't, as you might have thought, change his number to avoid the call just because he was unprepared to answer. He simply followed his heart and found that he could, indeed, be equipped to serve in such an unexpected way.¹

Sometimes, when we sense a call to venture out in service to others, or to apologize for our hurtful words or actions, or to nurture or comfort someone in need; sometimes when such a thought comes to us, we hesitate and our answer becomes, "Someone else will do it;" or, "Not now;" or, "I can't, too busy, not smart enough, "don't have what it takes."

And yet, we see in our Old Testament lesson today, that such callings, to step out of our comfort zone and do the right thing, are really more about God than they are about us. Jeremiah is just a boy when he senses a calling from God, a calling to speak the truth in love, through his words and actions. "I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms," say God, "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." And Jeremiah answers, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

What Jeremiah has not yet learned is that God will provide what it takes for him to speak and to act, that ultimately it won't be Jeremiah who plucks up and pulls down, destroys and overthrows, builds up and plants, but rather God. Jeremiah has to learn that it's not about Jeremiah; it's about God.

¹ Story found on the Websites pastor2youth.com and <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/r/rights.htm>

And likewise for us, our calling in life as children of God is to build up and to nurture that which God desires – peace and love, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, working in us and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's about God; not us.

When Jeremiah says to God, "I am only a boy," God answers, 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. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you...." God had a plan.

But regardless of what God has planned for him and for his life, Jeremiah looks in the mirror and see "only a boy." But God looks at Jeremiah and sees so much more – the promise of faithfulness, peace and love restored.

Jeremiah lived during the 13th year that King Josiah reigned over Judah; that's about 630 years before Jesus was born. The nation of Israel had been captured by the Assyrians, and neighboring Judah had fallen into idolatry. The Judeans worshiped other Gods and had turned away from the Lord. So we can understand why Jeremiah felt ill-equipped to make any real and lasting change on God's behalf.

We all feel powerless to make real and lasting change in certain areas of our lives or in our world. But just as the Lord had a plan to equip and lead Jeremiah, God stands ready to equip us and lead us to make a difference in life.

When you sense that something ought to be done and it's clear to you that God's hand is guiding you – or maybe pushing you a bit – would it make any difference to you if you heard God saying, "It is I who sends you; do not be afraid," just like he says to Jeremiah. Would it make any difference to you if you heard God saying, "I am with you; I have put my words in your mouth." Would that help you to step out in faith, and to speak words of peace and love in all that you say and do?

A big part of God's plan involves equipping us and sending us to build up the Kingdom of God; to recognize and nurture those areas of life where peace and love need to be planted, where division and anger need to be torn down – whether that's in our personal lives, our society, or on a global scale.

We all have a voice, we can all take action to build up the Kingdom of God, whether that be in our own homes, or beyond. And you do that, whether it's by speaking love and peace into a situation at home or elsewhere, or by acting on behalf of those in need.

Whenever you find the words to say and the actions to take that make Christ come alive in the heart of another human being; whenever you truly participate in the miracle of God's Kingdom come, God's will done, on earth

as it is in heaven, wherever God's lead we're to step forward in love & service, building up the kingdom.

And all it takes for this miracle to happen is for you and I to answer the call, even if we're not so sure about it, not sure that you – that I – am the one who is supposed to take the initiative.

Last week I got a call from a fellow named Paul Dodd. Turns out he was calling for Yuri, but he decided I would do just as well. Answering the phone I said, "Hello." "Mr. Ito?" came the reply. I hesitated just a moment before saying, "Yes." After I hung up and told Yuri that Dodds Jewelers had fixed her earrings, I the "Mr. Ito thing," saying, "I took it like a man."

Sometimes we hesitate to answer the call. And in that moment of hesitation, we have to decide how to respond, what would serve the situation best, and is this perhaps a call that God can put to use somewhere in our lives or in the world – even if it's just useful as a sermon illustration.

Whether to answer God's call, to get with God's plan: it's a choice we all make, countless times throughout the day. Should we get up and get moving, speak up and set things straight, build up or even to tear down? Answering such questions comes easier when we realize it's not about us; it's about God?

Life is a series of choices: maybe I should just stay put, keep quiet, continue to do what I'm doing. Don't we have those thoughts, those impulses – often mindlessly, or lost in negative emotions or self-defeating attitudes?

At those moments when we're thinking like that, the thing to remember is that God has a plan, and he is calling to you to be a part of it. You might even say it's God's calling plan. When God calls to you, God has already put his words in your heart, his actions right at the tips of your fingers; God has placed you and me on a solid foundation and is ready to equip each of us to step out in love and service. Knowing that it's all part of God's plan, there is really no reason not to move forward – to live into the new possibilities God has in store for us – in store for you – as a father or mother, grandparent, or aunt or uncle, brother or sister; as a church member, or coworker, or teammate; as a friend, or boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife. Wherever you find yourself, God has a plan.

The next time you sense God asking you to make a choice, look for the words God has already given to you in reply – the words that God has put on your heart. Perhaps words like, "I was wrong; will you forgive me?"

Or words of comfort for those who are grieving, words and actions that nurture relationships, provide for those in need, express love and peace in the face of anger and confrontation, words that bring promise and commitment.

God says to Jeremiah, " Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; and before you were born I consecrated you," set you apart to speak and act on the Lord's behalf. And so it is with us; God has a plan for each of us. And that includes you, and me.

And so God calls to the Jeremiah in all of us today, eager for our response, saying, "Will you follow me? Will you become who I've made you to be? Will you speak my words?" Will you? Will you listen for God's call to you, in each and every moment of your life, and if so, how will you respond?

Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O God, to come to you is to come home, for you are eternally our God. From you every family takes its name, and your household of faith gives the pattern for every human household.

We thank you for showing us, in Jesus, that we belong to you and that you care for us. Help us to believe it, and to believe that we ought not live so fearfully and selfishly.

For we hear your call, O Lord, and want desperately to respond with faith and purpose. Help us when we falter and faint and fail. Let us see and hear you work in our lives in such a way that it is not only us who trust and believe, but all who come near.

Remove any doubt that it is you we hear in the quiet moments of our hesitation, as we move out in service and love.

And equip us, Lord, to do what you ask, confident that you are sending us and guiding us.

Guide us now, Holy Spirit, to act on your behalf, even as we speak the words that you gave us through Jesus Christ, saying together,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

