

## **“Consecrated by God”**

**Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
November 23, 2014**

**New Testament Lesson: Romans 8:28-30  
Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 1:4-10**

God says, “Before you were born, I consecrated you.” Of course, he said this to the prophet Jeremiah, setting him apart for a specific role in life (that’s what consecration means – setting something or someone aside for a special and holy purpose).

And yet, in many ways day-to-day life doesn’t feel special and holy, “life is a task” – life is work, notes Johann Christoph Arnold, in her book *Seeking Peace*.<sup>1</sup> But then she expands this definition for the “religious person.” “The religious person differs from the apparently irreligious,” says Arnold, “only by experiencing his (or her) existence not simply as a task, but as a mission.” “... Whenever we let our work become an end in itself,” she says, “we lose sight of the love that gives it a deeper purpose, and gradually it becomes a mindless, mechanical chore. With love, the most mundane task can take on meaning. Without it, the noblest task can become drudgery.”

My prayer for First Presbyterian Church is that, whatever we do, we do it in love. Just as God consecrated Jeremiah for a special and holy role in building up God’s Kingdom, so God has a special and holy purpose for you as a member and friend of this church, and for all of us together as a community of worship and service here in Independence.

Whether we experience that role as work or as a divine mission depends on how we approach it; do we approach all that we do in spirit of God’s love? When God first planted a word of calling in the heart of Jeremiah, Jeremiah misunderstood it. “Ah, Lord God! he said. “Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”

Jeremiah mistakenly focused only on his skills and abilities, rather than having faith in what God desired for him. It’s hard for God to bless us with unimaginable growth and vitality if we focus only on what we can imagine for ourselves – apart from God. As someone once said, “Without God, we can’t. Without us, God won’t.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Johann Christoph Arnold, *Seeking Peace* (Farmington: The Plough Publishing House, 1998), 174.

Whatever we want for First Presbyterian Church and the community we serve, it's clear that God has a bigger vision in mind than we do. Our job is to **tap into God's vision**. But how do we do that?

First, we focus on God, not ourselves. This is not as easy as it sounds. Look at what Jeremiah faced when he looked in the mirror. He felt unequipped, afraid, alone, and destined for failure. But God said to him, "Do not be afraid..., for I am with you to deliver you...."

At the time of Jeremiah, the people of Judah had let their hearts wander from God. They began to follow the path of least resistance, which is what Jeremiah himself wanted to do at first – "I am only a boy," he says – the path of least resistance, seeing what's possible from our perspective only.

But God says, no, "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.'" "Before I formed you in the womb," says God, "I knew you. ... I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

And Jeremiah goes on to proclaim the downfall of the Babylonian Empire and a future for God's people of healing, security, prosperity, and joy, a future that anticipated the rise of King David, known as a man after God's own heart. Jeremiah, by devoting himself to God's call, was able to see the bright future that God had in store for God's people.

What future do we see for First Presbyterian Church? I guarantee you, if we look only with our limited vision, we will miss what God is up to. We risk overlooking the evidence all around us of what God is accomplishing through this church.

This afternoon, we welcome members of this community to our All-Church Thanksgiving Dinner. Now this means we've had to plan for a little extra food, do a little extra work in preparation. But since it's done in the spirit of God's love, the task is made easier, many hands making lighter work. By ourselves we are limited, but with God, we can work miracles.

A young man was working at a construction site when he began bragging that he could outdo anyone in a feat of strength. He made a special case of making fun of one of the older workmen, named Morris. After several minutes, Morris had enough. "Why don't you put your money where your mouth is?" he said. "I will bet a week's wages that I can haul something in a wheelbarrow over to that building that you won't be able to wheel back." "You're on, old man," said the braggart. "It's a bet! Let's see what you got." And that's when Morris reached out, grabbed the wheelbarrow by the handles, and then, nodding to the young man, he said, "All right. Get in."

The young man came to see there is something more powerful than his own strength and resources. By ourselves we are limited, but with God, we can work

miracles. When the work of this church is undertaken in the spirit of God's love – with our focus on God and not ourselves – it is a joy for us and a blessing for our community.

Just look at all the ways we give – the ways you give – both financial and of our time and talents. There's Operation Christmas Child, the Sow & Sew quilts for children at Drumm Farm, our partnership with local schools and the Harvesters foodbank, providing meals at Habitat worksites, and making contributions to Hillcrest Ministries, Hope House, Boys & Girls Clubs, and the Free Clinic, just to name a few.

Believe it or not, there's more that we do through our Missions Committee and Presbyterian Woman, , the Unlimited gathering, and our small groups for ChristCare, Sunday school, and Bible study. We do all this to make a difference in this world, which is our calling as a community of faith.

In calling Jeremiah, God said, "... I have put my words in your mouth.... In a similar way, God has called First Presbyterian Church to be a voice of hope in a hurting world. We like Jeremiah are called to speak a word of **healing, security, prosperity, and joy.**

To do so, we actually need to tell people what this church is doing to overcome illness, poverty, injustice, and sadness. For our ministry to reach out beyond what we can imagine, we have to speak up, we have to let people know what God is doing here in the spirit of selfless, divine love.

God has given us so much to be thankful for, so much to be raising up to the glory of God. The hardest part for us – because we are easily distracted and our vision is limited – the hardest part is staying focused on what God is doing, despite our wants and needs, and fears.

In a few moments, we will bring our commitment cards to the Lord's Table, pledging our financial support for 2015. As we do so, let's be sure to bring our whole selves in service to God, including our witness to what God is up to in our lives. God is calling us to give voice to a bright and vibrant future for First Presbyterian Church.

If the prospect of talking to people about the wonderful ministry happening in this church leaves you feeling like Jeremiah felt at first – unequipped, afraid, alone, and destined to failure – take heart in the promise he received from the Lord. "Do not be afraid..." God is "with you, to deliver you...."

As the pledge cards are brought forward, imagine yourself telling someone in your life – maybe someone you haven't even met yet – about the ministries of this church. And trust that when the opportunity does arise and if you look for it, it will, God will give you the words to say.

We are called to be a voice of hope in a hurting world. So in addition to putting our money where our mouth is, let us also put our mouth where our money is. Let us share, sometime this week, about what God is doing through this church. Amen.

### **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Pathmaker God, prepare the way that we should go; make straight your paths.

We know we have burdened you with our pettiness; we have wearied you with our sin. But now, as you set us upon the road you are blazing into the new age, you promise that you will not hold the old age against us.

You have formed us to follow you into your kingdom, O God. May your faithfulness to us inspire our devotion to you.

Lord, we pray for those who are starting out on new paths, particularly for Rick Gilpin – and his family, Lord.

We pray for Doris Melton and her family as they – and we – grieve the loss of Lem.

We pray for those who are struggling with illnesses, those recovering from surgery, those seeking healing in their lives, whether physically, emotionally, socially, financially, or spiritually.

Instill in them – and us – the certainty that you are with us and will deliver us from these and any troubling circumstances.

We are bold to pray all this, O God, because of the unimaginable boldness you showed in raising up your son our Lord. So we join him in praying to you, using the words that he taught us, saying:

**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.**