

“A Word To The Nations”

**Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
August 7, 2016**

Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 1:4-10

New Testament Lesson: John 1:1-5

One of my all-time favorite movie lines comes from Jimmy Stewart. Playing a lawyer in the film “Anatomy of a Murder,” he turns to the jury and says, “I’m just a humble country lawyer trying to do the best I can against this brilliant prosecutor from the big city of Lansing.”

Believe me, he does that line much better than I can. He does that line so well, in fact, that he then goes on to win the case, thanks to his sharp legal mind and skill with courtroom theatrics. Country lawyer, my foot!

Anyway, this movie line came to mind last Wednesday as I consider how to introduce this week’s sermon theme. So, here you have it, Jimmy Stewart playing a humble-yet-brilliant attorney juxtaposed with the humble-and - inexperienced Jeremiah – “... for I am only a boy,” he says, as if God hasn’t heard that one before. This isn’t God’s first rodeo when it comes to inspiring and equipping his chosen people for greatness.

And yet, isn’t that often how we feel? I’m just one person, or, I don’t know if I have what it takes, or, they won’t listen to me; who am I to say. God hears us say such things to ourselves or others and shrugs. God nods and shrugs and says yes, yes, but, “You are just the person I’m looking for; trust me, I’ll show you how to do it; and the oldie but goody when it comes to one-liner comebacks from God: If not you, then who - Who will speak for God – if not you-me-us?

Now this is where I would usually begin encouraging you to get out there on God’s behalf and share the Good News of Jesus Christ in all that you say and do! I’m not going to do that today – though you should ... share the Good News, in all that you say and do.

But what we’re actually focusing on today is the question of what exactly was Jeremiah called to do. What Jeremiah was actually called to do was to speak a word to the nations, on God’s behalf.

No wonder Jeremiah felt ill-equipped. But as Jeremiah and all the other prophets of the Lord have found out, feeling ill-equipped and even facing opposition is not a valid reason, in God’s eyes, to not speak out, to not act, to set aside God’s message in favor of what’s easier.

So ask yourself, are the nation’s of the world today listening to God? Is anyone listening?!? By and large, they are not, we are not listening. At least not those nations that are powerful enough and vocal enough to influence the course of human history.

The smaller, quieter nations may be going about their business in relative peace and tranquility (I don't know; they're quiet). But we're certainly not. Not America and not Mexico and not Russia. Not the Middle East, Europe, China, North or South Korea, and not even the Africa nations are innocent when it comes to ignoring the will of God nor Australia. And I don't know about Antarctica.

But what I do know is when God calls to Jeremiah saying, "... You shall go to all whom I send you," this is who he is sending him to – the nations of the world, at least the vocal and powerful nations, including at the time, God's beloved Israel, our spiritual ancestors. God had a bone to pick with Israel over how they acting.

And yet, just like God loves Israel and never abandoned it in spite of its disobedience, so God loves us and will never abandoned us and our country, no matter how lost we get sometimes.

In other words, just because the word of God sometimes falls on deaf ears, does not mean that God does not care about those ears, or the people they belong to. God is there for us – not only as individuals but as a nation. God cares about the United States of America!

God cares deeply for our country and for all countries of the world. And God's will will be done – come hell or high water. Do ya'll know that saying, "come hell or high water?" It means "whatever difficulties may occur." Whatever struggles we as a nation are facing, God is still in charge and God will win the victory.

It just may take a little something. It just may be that we and our neighbors and our friends and even our enemies have to make some difficult adjustments to who we are. 'Cause let me tell you, God's New Heaven and New Earth are assured, whether we intend to embrace it or not.

And that's where Jeremiah comes in. Jeremiah is sent to tell the nations of the world, in no uncertain terms, that they better shape up, or God will rain down all kinds of hellish incentives for them to change their ways. I guess that's kind of the bad news. Unless you're on God's side and would do anything to see God's will be done. Those who are on God's side realize that God is going to have to knock a few heads together before the world wakes up, before people start treating each other right, before we as citizens of this country – and citizens of the world – create a system works, in keeping with who God is.

So, yes, the bad news is it never comes easy, and it's not easy now – not for our country, not for our church and I'm guessing not for most of us as individuals. Life isn't easy in this day and age – that's the bad news.

But of course, where there's bad news, there's always the good news to counterbalance it – and overcome it. When the news we buy into is the Good News Jesus Christ, we have nothing to fear. Is anyone ready to hear the good news – the Good News found in our Bible reading for today?

In Jeremiah 10 God says, “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.”

The Good News is that whenever God plucks something up, pulls something down, destroys or overthrows something or someone, God, in that very place, builds or plants something new.

God always finds a way to work out the changes that need made in the fulfillment of God’s plan and purpose, no matter how stubborn we are along the way. It’s kind of like the story of the old Quaker farmer who would never use the name of the Lord in vain. Then one day, when he slapped his mule’s reins to get the animal moving, it wouldn’t budge an inch. The farmer tried everything: coaxing, cajoling, even pleading, but without success. Finally, he reached the end of his rope. “Mule,” he said in a quiet voice, “thee knows that, because of my religion, I cannot beat thee, or curse thee, or abuse thee in any way. But mule, what thee doesn’t know is that I can sell thee to an Episcopalian.”¹ Of course it doesn’t matter if it’s an Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian Disciples of Christ or what type of Christian you are, God will use God’s people to achieve God’s vision. God is building and planting something new, even now.

And yes, we all have a role in that. But more importantly, we can all take comfort in that. I don’t want anyone here to loose heart; God doesn’t want anyone here to loose heart. God is big enough, wise enough, gracious enough, and powerful enough to handle things. Trust me.

All we have to do is follow where God leads and, above all, trust that God will prevail, even if he does have to coax and cajole us along the way. So yes, trust in your country, trust in yourself, but above all else, trust in God. 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 believing that we do belong to Christ, help us to center our lives on you.

Show us the deeper joy of service, and give us peace through the Holy Spirit.

We pray all this in the powerful name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

¹ As told by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

**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.**