

*Texts: Jeremiah 1:1-10, 7:1-11*

*Subject: Call and Temple Sermon*

*Theme: Go and Tell*

*Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 4, 2021; Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

What am I here for? What is my purpose? What's the point? I think these are questions we all ask from time to time. What a privilege it is to even have the space and time to reflect on such things. This is part of what we think of when we think of our freedom as Americans - especially today as we celebrate our independence. Our purpose is not thrust upon us, at least not explicitly. No one tells us what we have to do with our lives. Maybe you had a high school guidance counselor tell you what you'd be good at based on some test or the grades you got. Most of us get to decide to follow our hopes and dreams and fulfill a destiny that we create for ourselves. Maybe not that long ago, if you were born on a farm, guess what - you're probably going to be a farmer for the rest of your days. If your family owned a business, you might be expected to take up that same business, out of duty or necessity or convenience. The trades get passed on. If you came from a family of soldiers you probably went into the military. A century or more ago, there were even fewer options if you were a woman or person of color. But our purpose is more than work, our reason for living more than procreation, and as our world grows more fractured and more complex, we will occasionally wonder what on earth our lives are supposed to be all about. We build lives based on our interests and desires, and follow opportunities and passions to create and earn and experience what the world has to offer and to provide for ourselves and our families. But is that what we're really made to do?

Jeremiah was a descendant of a priestly family. Though his family were not the ones in power during most of his life. He lived in a town about 3 miles north of Jerusalem, when the Assyrian empire was beginning to crumble, and King Josiah in Jerusalem was beginning reforms that would re-center worship in the temple there. During his lifetime, the Babylonians empire would become the dominant power, and the temple would be destroyed. There was political turmoil, division, violence and war, uncertainty and change all around. Jeremiah's purpose comes to him through a Word from God. God says:

“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.”

Like Moses, and just about all the prophets, Jeremiah says, “No, thanks.” This is not usually a vocation with a happy ending, a long retirement, or a pension. To be a prophet during times of trouble, would be a dangerous profession, and how could this one, even from a family of priests even begin to take on the call of speaking God's truth and judgment to the nations? But the Lord replies, “you shall go to all whom I send you... and ...do not be afraid.”

Jeremiah didn't volunteer. He wasn't elected by a committee of his peers. He was appointed by God to live out this purpose. Hear the immediacy of the calling, “Today I appoint you...” Now is the time to *go and tell*. God will give the Word, and God will guide the feet of the prophet. The Word will not be not a popular one; not a word of prosperity and freedom and manifest destiny. This prophet is first appointed “to pluck up, and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow [and then later] to build and to plant.”

Who are the prophets we hear speaking today? Are they the pundits on radio and TV who seem to daily stoke the fires of division? Are they politicians who promise change and compromise but deliver more of the same old status quo? Are they religious leaders arguing about this and that, bemoaning the decline of church attendance and fighting culture wars? Maybe they're the children and poets, and neighbors who live in the park, and people of color crying out for justice and ones who still proclaim hope and a future for a world if only this nation would hold true to the ideals we say we believe in? They are prophets. May we hear them. May we be them.

What does God desire to be plucked up and pulled down? To be destroyed and overthrown? Was it the monarchy? Systems of oppression? The temple itself? The Hebrew Bible proclaims - for the most part - a theology that understands that if the people obeyed God, they would be blessed. As they disobeyed they would find hardship and be cursed. Jeremiah's focus was on following the commandments in the way of Moses - this was more central to a life of faith than getting caught up in worship in the temple. The prophets throughout history called for a return to God, called for people, and especially rulers to give up on worshipping other gods, promoting themselves and going after wealth and power. The whole world needed to change.

Jeremiah is sent to stand in the gate of the temple - the center of religious practice, where sacrifices were made, and where the money flowed. He would stand in the gate to say, "Amend your ways!" Repent and believe! "Let me dwell with you." Hear that - God is speaking, pleading to the people, to be allowed to dwell with them. God longs and desires to be with them.

Eugene Petersen relays the words in *the Message*:

*“Only if you clean up your act (the way you live, the things you do), only if you do a total spring cleaning on the way you live and treat your neighbors, only if you quit exploiting the street people and orphans and widows, no longer taking advantage of innocent people on this very site and no longer destroying your souls by using this Temple as a front for other gods—only then will I move into your neighborhood. Only then will this country I gave your ancestors be my permanent home, my Temple.”*

Jesus taught in the same tradition. From the beginning of His ministry, 600 years after Jeremiah, He called people to turn their lives to God, to repent and believe, and to serve. Jesus called His followers to practices of radical generosity, non-violence, humility, and an end to oppression. As God with us, he held children in his arms and rebuked any who would hurt them. We all are God’s children and that includes every nation on the earth. The Word that came to Jeremiah walked with us, and welcomed us, and at the cross took on all our human failures, and brought us back into relationship with God who knew us before we were born. Named us as his family, and promised to be with us forever. He sends us to serve and love. Can we hear the prophetic call to love God, to serve one another, to protect the vulnerable among us, and welcome each other in Jesus’ name?

As we continue to emerge from a global pandemic, and other difficult events in our recent past, we have a chance to re-examine who we are as Americans, as the church, and as neighbors. We can reflect with honesty on how we’ve done things the past, and consider ideas that we have held onto for so long. Many are reflecting on their careers, some on their relationships, and others on their faith and spirituality. We’re taking stock, and that’s a good thing. It’s an opportunity for us, as people of faith, to let

go of the things that have held us back, and to find new ways to practice our faith, to hear God's voice calling us here and now.

The Word comes to us, too. The Word of God in Jesus Christ still speaks to us, still calls us, and knows us. Each one of us baptized into this priesthood of all believers is called to die to ourselves, to our selfishness, and rise up in new life now - forgiven and renewed with the Word of God in us. And we don't need to be afraid - just like God promised Jeremiah - we are not alone. Jesus goes with us. We all have a purpose. You have been called and sent, with a word of hope to share. Even when we're afraid, we're called to *go and tell* the good news of what God has done for every nation. We share what we have received here: grace in Jesus Christ, forgiveness given at this very table, a promise that Christ will be with us on the way.

We say we want God to dwell with us - to abide in us and be with us. At times we have been caught up in the ways of the world and ways we've always done things, and the traditions that bring us comfort. When we hear the voice of the prophets, we hear God's voice calling us back to the core of our faith. We are called back to the word, to the font and to the table. We are called back into Jesus' arms, washed and fed, blessed and set to go and tell others. We can be reminded of our calling as disciples, to be ones who do not bow to any power but Christ, who do not need a temple to worship, who do not trust in the world but in the crucified and risen Savior, Jesus - who sees us and knows us and welcomes us as we are, who casts out our fears and goes with us always, to live our purpose. To share love and grace and peace in His name. This is our purpose: to love and serve, to trust in Jesus, to go and tell. Thanks be to God. Amen.