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Chosen and Called
Jeremiah 1:4-10

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
⁵ *“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.”
⁶ *Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a*
boy.” ⁷ *But the Lord said to me,*
“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.
⁸ *Do not be afraid of them,*
for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”
⁹ *Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to*
me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth.
¹⁰ *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.”

In 2002, a teenager named ***William Kamkwamba of Wimbe in Malawi, Africa***, was suffering during a drought and famine. His family members were each eating one scoop of nsima per day, shared out of a small pot. Day after day he watched his friends and relatives grow weaker, and many died of hunger and disease. He was not able to go past 8th grade, because his family could not afford the school fees.

William spent his time farming,
 But also taking apart radios, playing with batteries,
 and studying books on science and technology,
 learning all he could about electricity.
 And one day, he read about the power of ***windmills***.

That was a turning point.

This determined teenager, using scrap metal, tractor parts, and a bicycle, ***made a windmill that brought electricity to his family compound.***

It powered a water pump to irrigate the farm, helping them to battle the drought and famine.

He then built a solar-powered water pump to supply drinking water to his entire village!

William went on to ***pursue his education*** in Johannesburg.

And eventually Dartmouth in the United States.

He founded the Moving Windmills Project in 2008, which supports rural economic development in Malawi.

It's motto is "*African Solutions to African Problems*".

William not only changed lives around him,

he inspired the entire world with his determination and creativity.

His story is told in the wonderful book entitled,

"The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind",

It is also now a heartwarming Netflix movie that I just saw.

William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, Puffin: New York, 2015.

With our connection to Malawi,

watching and reading this is like cheering for a best friend!

It is all the more meaningful as we collect funds for clean water in Malawi!

We are hopefully going to be hosting ***more Malawi friends*** this November, and it's just amazing to think about not only William's story,

but also the story of brave men and women in Malawi

who are working to change lives,

especially through organizations in the Presbyterian church,

and the Marion Medical Mission—which will help build the water wells!

These are the stories that ***movies are made of***—

ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

People who are ***called to make a difference*** in the world.

Jeremiah was like William.

He was called by God to be a prophet,

during a ***difficult time*** in the history of God's people,

as they were torn from their homeland and exiled to Babylon.

***At first, he thought he couldn't do it,
he didn't think he had the skills, he said, "I'm too young!" ...***

And all of that is so familiar in the Bible, isn't it?

Remember **Moses**? He was a murderer, who ran away from Egypt.

And he had a huge stuttering problem!

Even **William** had his doubts about understanding electricity,
especially when his father couldn't send him to school anymore.

But what if God works in crazy ways?

Like ***when we have doubts*** about our calling,

That's when God's power really shines through our lives!

I believe that—we see that in the Bible!

When we feel ill equipped for our calling,

That's when ***we rely upon the power of Jesus in us.***

It's really not about us---it's about Jesus in us!

In **2 Corinthians 12:9** God says to Paul,

'my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'

The power of God IN US is more than we can comprehend, right?

It is the power to do things beyond our imagination,

To rise above and beyond what we ever thought possible.

And the truth is, our incredible ***God uses ordinary people like us—***

To do some great things....

even when, especially when, We have our doubts!

When we say—*I'm too old, too young, too shy, too introverted!*

That's when God steps in and starts moving in our lives in amazing ways!

But does this mean we are ALL called like Jeremiah?

Does this mean we should identify with people like him?

Or Moses? Or Isaiah? Or Elijah?

Can William, from Malawi?

Not many of us are appointed a prophet,

or called to free a people,

or even to bring water to our city, right?

So how does this story relate to us?

Where are we in the story?

Well, what if we are right in the middle of it?

God knows us too, from before we are even born.

None of us is an accident.

Every person has a purpose,
and God knows that before we even begin!

And as ***members of the body*** of Christ,
we each have a part to play in the body,
we are each an ear or an eye, a hand or a foot,
just as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12.
Now that Jesus has been resurrected, we, like the disciples,
Have been ***called to be his body on earth.***
We are called to be Jesus Christ to others!

St. Teresa of Avila said it so well:

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
No hands and feet but yours, yours are the eyes, the ears, the mouth of God.*

We are Jesus to other people in this world!

It's a wild and crazy calling---but it's not about us,

And it's not about us doing this on our own!

It's about ***Christ in us.***

It's about ***God working through us.***

And it doesn't have to be a big grand plan—sometimes it's just small things!

When we think about a calling from God,
About what God would have us do, in a particular day or hour,
It can be scary, if we're honest, right?

If you put yourself out there, people can react to you in different ways!

I believe this is why God said to Jeremiah,
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord."
I need to hear that, don't you?

So, where are you appointed, today, right now?

If you're not sure, ask yourself this:

What is my ***sphere of influence?***

We all have people who watch us, who look to us,

We all have people whom we can and do influence, right?

Who are they?

Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor ***Viktor Frankl*** once said:
*Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life;
 everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment.
 Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated,
 thus, everyone's task is unique. (from Man's Search for Meaning)*

What if God's words to Jeremiah—are words for US--today?

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
 and before you were born I consecrated you;.....*

*⁸Do not be afraid of them,
 for I am with you to deliver you,
 says the Lord."*

What if we too are called to do important things in our everyday lives?

Have you ever felt that ***nudge***---when God puts a person on your heart, and you think—I've got to reach out to them, I need to pray for them?

Have you ever been ***driving*** one way, and God told you to go another?

Have you ever been ***shopping***, and God urges you to buy something for someone else?

What if following God's call is sometimes ***small and simple*** to us,
But life changing to other people?

What if God wants to use us to ***answer*** someone else's prayers?

I believe God does that all the time---***all the time!***

In the Book of Exodus, ***two midwives for Hebrew women,
 named Shiprah and Puah***, they felt God calling them to go against the order
 of the Pharaoh, who decreed that every Hebrew baby boy be killed.

Instead, they saved those babies.

Talk about life-changing!

How has God appointed You?

And set you apart---to be who you are, to do what you alone can do?

We each have influence—

Where we live, and work, where we shop and play,
in our homes and in our neighborhoods.

Think about that for a minute.

Whose lives are you touching?

Is it a Spouse? Kids? Extended family? Work colleagues?

Clients? Friends? Neighbors?

What about your hairdresser or barber?

Your postal carrier? Your teachers?

Your friends here at church?

In the classic film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, **George Bailey** considers ending his life after falling upon hard times....and an angel named Clarence comes to help him reconsider by showing him just how much his life is intertwined with others.

"Strange, isn't it, George? Each man's life touches so many other lives.

When he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" –It's a Wonderful Life.

I believe there are ***lives that ONLY we can touch***, you know?

No matter who you are, ***there's no substitute for you!***

We shouldn't wait and say....SOMEONE ELSE can do that!

That, NEVER flies with our God!

God says the same thing to us as God said to Jeremiah!

I chose you, I called you, I appointed you....and I'll help you!

You and I—we are the people God wants to use!

And it ***doesn't matter your abilities, or disabilities, isn't that great?***

Everyone touches lives, right?

I believe some of the most humble and simple people are making the biggest difference in the world!

Being called and used by God---it's really different from the way our world works, isn't it?

We've all heard about boosting kids self-esteem, right?

***We say to kids---You can be anything you want to be!
Just work hard, and set your mind to it!***

But is that even true?

I mean, you can't really be ANYTHING you want to be, right?

I mean, I cannot be a concert pianist,

A long-distance runner, or a basketball star---***no matter how hard I try!***

I can set my mind to being an Olympic athlete, and

It's ***never going to happen!***

Why?

Because those are not my God-given skills or abilities!

God didn't set me apart for that.

But God DOES have a special job for me---just like God has for you!

***And my self-esteem or self-worth does NOT come from successfully doing
what I 'set my mind' to do!***

Yet, that's what we tell people!

We tell them, you can do it!

And when you do it, you are a good person!

With self-worth and self-esteem.

Which is a lie.

A very common one.

Isn't the truth quite different?

What's true is that we are children of God,

And our REAL self-worth comes from being children of God.

And as children of God, ***we have a mission to be who God calls us to be,***

Who God made us to be!

Which is great news, when you think about it!

It's might even be a relief!

We CANNOT be anything we want to be,

But we can be everything God wants us to be!

Rev. Rodney Buchanan reminds us that the world works differently:

*The American culture places extreme value on...youth, beauty, athletic ability,
intelligence, education, wealth, and fame.*

But what happens when you lose it? ...Where do you get feelings of esteem and personal worth, when everything on which you have based your value has vanished? Rev. Rodney Buchanan, Sept 1, 2009 sermon, "Healthy Self-Esteem"

Friends, the **REAL view of ourselves**,
 should come from **God's view of us!**
 And God **loves** us as children.
 And God **has called** us,
 And God has **set us apart** for a particular time and purpose!

You have a purpose---and **only you** have been called to a particular service,
 To those special nudges of God, day in and day out.
 You are called to make a **difference**.
 There is **no substitute for YOU**.

Maybe our prayer should be,
that God gives us the courage we need to BE who we are called to be!
 To see the difference WE can make.

I think this is what **Paul means in Philippians 4:13**, when he says,
I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me.
 And in **Philippians 1:6** when he says:
⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for our lives, for each moment of our lives,
 If we have the eyes and ears to receive it.
 It's not about us.
 It's Jesus at work in us.

Later in the book of **Jeremiah, chapter 29:11**
 God says: *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*

You know, **in our Luke 13 reading today, Jesus heals a crippled woman**.
 She may have given up hope, after being crippled for 18 years!
 But Jesus sees her—and he calls her over in the synagogue, on the Sabbath,
 And says to her: *"Woman, you are set free from your ailment."* ¹³ *When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.*

Sometimes our calling from God begins with being SET FREE,
From whatever is holding us down, or back.
From whatever destructive habits or beliefs we have, you know?
Sometimes, we are our own worst enemies,
And Jesus---wants to set us FREE from that!
Free—so that we can be who God made us to be!
So we can do what God made us to do!

Friends, hear the Good News of our Gospel today!
You are custom made for YOUR mission in this world,
It doesn't matter who you are, or where you've been,
It doesn't matter how much or how long you have ignored God,
Or run away from Jesus!

God has a calling on your life, and plans just for you.
God is speaking to you in every moment of every day,
All we have to do, is pay attention!

Wherever you ***go***, ***God is sending you.***
Wherever you ***are***, ***God is with you.***
The ***Holy Spirit*** is inside of you,
And ***Jesus*** wants to work through you.

May God give ALL of us the courage
to believe and follow that call,
And for that, all God's people said, Amen.