

Sermon: Called to Mission

Jeremiah 1:1-19

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In the weeks ahead we will in our worship services focus on the mission of the church. What does God expect from us?

>> Short testimony of someone who felt called to go into mission

Today we listen to the words the prophet Jeremiah. For us here in Egypt, he is a special person, as he lived here for a while. Rumor has it that he was buried in Coptic Cairo, at the place where you can now find the Jewish Ben Ezra synagogue. His words point us to the mission that God has given to each of us.

1 Life in times of stress

God called Jeremiah to be a prophet but Jeremiah was not happy at all to be singled out. He did not *want* to be a prophet - because it was so very difficult. The opening verses of the book of Jeremiah paint for us a brief picture of who Jeremiah was, and the problems he was facing.

In the first verses of the book of Jeremiah, we read that his father was a priest, and therefore Jeremiah was one as well. If you were born in the right family, you automatically qualified to the priesthood.

But 'the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah...' God is not silent; he speaks. I have some friends from the wrong church, and it is amazing how God speaks to them... in dreams, in visions. Very clear. And He can also speak to you. In fact he had left the church with 2000 pages of his speech. We have no excuse if we think God does not speak to us. He speaks loud and clear; and what He wants from us is abundantly clear.

Jeremiah served God in the time of king Josiah, under king Jehoiakim, and under king Zedekiah. Those were famous kings of Israel; their names represent the spiritual state of the people of God.

What was the state of the religious life at this time? We can read elsewhere in the Bible about the reformation under King Josiah. A reformation that occurred five years after Jeremiah was called by God.

King Josiah decided to begin some reconstruction work on the temple. We do not know why he decided to do so, but it was an excellent idea! And in this process of

reconstruction, the priests found the Book of the Law of God in the temple.

Both are extremely important - we need to listen to the word of God and obey Him - and we need to also think of building the church, even the buildings. This is our mission here in Egypt and in the world. I am personally quite interested in opening new places for worship, new churches...

When God called Jeremiah, Israel's temple needed repairs, and people bowed down for statues of Baal and Asherah, and some of those were even placed in the temple of God. Many priest were involved in this paganism. There was much sexual immorality, even in the temple. And in their private homes, many people used statues of false gods.

No wonder Jeremiah did not dance from joy when God asked him to speak out; the nation was in a bad shape. In the past, they served the true God, but people had brought foreign religions into the nation. Jeremiah was called by God to call the nation back to our Lord and to his service, and to do away with false religion.

What a mission task God gave to Jeremiah!

It was a very tough task. And while under king Josiah there was a true revival - many turned to God - under the kings after Josiah things went bad again. Jeremiah preached the word but the people rejected his Gospel message. Things became so bad that God punished the nation - Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed.

And Jeremiah, the prophet of God, lived to see it all. No wonder he is often called the weeping prophet. He saw the rebuilding of the temple, and he lived to see its destruction.

2 God calls us to mission

How can *we* serve God? In the midst of so many problems, it is tempting to give up. We can live in our safe homes, keep our mouth shut, not upset anyone, and leave those people alone who reject the truth that God can only be known through his Son Jesus Christ, and who worship a false image of God. Let us just leave them alone!

But as a church, we do not have this option. God is calling us to be his voice in this world. He has given us the same mission that he gave to Jeremiah.

Read again Jeremiah 1:4-5:

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.

Jesus told his disciples and his church, before he returned to the Father: 'Go into the world and preach the Gospel...' Be a prophet to the nations!

God tells you:

I formed you – He is your Creator

I consecrated you – He is your savior

I appointed you a prophet to the nations – He is your Lord who sends you with a ministry into this world.

And all this begins with God who says that he knew you before he even created you!

God calls Jeremiah – and he calls us – by pointing at himself. At God. I knew, I formed, I consecrated, I appointed...

Mission begins with God. He made you, he saved you, he sends you.

Not all of us are called to preach, or to be a prophet. God is not telling all people to go overseas and plant churches. But he has called his church, as a whole, to go into the world. And you are part of that!

This means that all of us have a responsibility – to pray for missionaries, to pray that people come to know our Lord, to financially sacrifice for the mission of God, and yes, for some of you this means God wants you to go.

In the weeks ahead of us, we will speak about this topic again and again. What is your role in mission? What is your role in making the Good News of Jesus Christ known in this world? Use the coming time to ask yourself this question. Talk about it. Pray that God shows you your personal responsibility.

>> **Someone about the hardship of leaving your safe circumstances.**

Jeremiah wanted to stay home, to keep his mouth shut, to not show anyone that he was a true servant of God.

God had told him, I am the one who knows you, I made you, I saved you, I send you.

Jeremiah responds with: But Lord God, I do not know how to speak, I am too young. (Jeremiah 1:6)

God then responds with some anger, it seems. Do not say you are too young, because you WILL go to all people to whom I send you. You will say what I tell you to say.

Jeremiah, it is a matter of obedience. You have no option.

Just as we have no option. God sends his church, and as we are part of the church of God, we have no other option but to obey. A church that does not obey the mission of God, is rebelling against God. If you work in a butcher shop, you sell meat. If you are a teacher you teach. If you are a doctor, you heal. If you are a Christian, you are involved in the mission of God.

Sure, it is not easy. But God calls us to be brave, and not escape from our Christian responsibilities. To Jeremiah he said, in Jeremiah 1:17: 'Get yourself ready, stand up and say to them whatever I command you.'

Jeremiah has to get ready. Mission needs preparation, study, training. We need to understand our Bible well. We need to learn flexibility, for adapting to other cultures. We need to understand the people we are being sent to. I find it shocking here in Egypt how few Christians actually know anything about the major religion in this country.

Jeremiah has to straighten his back. This means, we have to get up and get going. Without fear we begin to obey. If you sense that God wants your involvement in his mission, take a first step, talk with people, ask advice. But do not just sit on the sofa waiting. Get up.

And we have to open our mouth. Jeremiah has to say to the people whatever God commands him to say. Do we know how to speak of our faith to others? Do we actually do it? God is a speaking God, and in his mission, we have to communicate – not keep our mouth closed, scared of the consequences.

It is not easy, and that is why God says to Jeremiah: 'Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.' (Jeremiah 1:8) Again we hear this echoed in the command of Jesus to his disciples to go into the world and preach the Gospel, 'for I am with you' wherever you go.

3 Promise of God and suffering

Our Lord then stretches out his hand to touch Jeremiahs mouth. Jeremiah physically felt the hand of God. How? We do not know. But Jeremiah felt it, and he knew: God is with me. He is Emmanuel. He promises to bless his servants with wisdom and knowledge for how to speak.

God is with those who obey him. But does this mean all things will go well and easy in mission? No of course. We have good reasons to be worried when we are asked to show our Christian faith and our Christian life, among our friends, in our job, among the people in the streets here in Cairo. We have enough reasons to be afraid. Will they laugh, will they mock us? Will they hurt us? Will it be bad for my job?

Yes, sometimes we run into problems. To Jeremiah and to you he promises in Jeremiah 1:19: 'They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the Lord.'

Is this a promise for an easy life? No ofcourse. Just Look at the life of Jesus and the apostles. Doing the will of God does not guarantee an easy life.

God's promise that he will guard us, is a promise that extends over death, into eternity. Being victorious is not having an easy life, but having a life in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ – until the very end.

This is what he is calling us to do: a life with Jesus Christ, the Son of God; to follow him everywhere. And as members of the church of Christ, this must mean, in one way or another, involvement in the mission of God in this world. What a great call of God for you!

Conclusion

Today God reminds us that he chose you before you were even born. He created you beautifully. He drew you to himself to set you apart, and he is sending you. How he sends you, what your role in his mission you have, that I cannot tell you. That is between you and your God.

But he touches you, as God touched Jeremiah and as Jesus blessed his disciples. He touches you for fulfilling your mission.

Today he does that especially through the very physical touch of Holy Communion, of Eucharist. He is present in a very real way to touch you; to give you strength; to give you stamina for following him all the time.

When we celebrate, let us kneel and pray to our Lord: 'I want to follow my Lord. Help me to not be afraid'. And Lord, show me my role in your mission I this world. Lead me to what you want me to do in this world. I am your servant.

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; Amen.