

“Sent Out”

A homily for confirmation Sunday

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Sunday, June 13, 2010-- Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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God called Jeremiah to be God’s prophet at a critical time. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was beset with terrifying military threats from the outside, inept leadership on the inside, not to mention a serious moral decline among the people. Perhaps not so different from our own times. God called Jeremiah to speak to the people and their leaders on God’s behalf, warning them to return to following God or face disastrous consequences. A prophet is someone who gives people a wake-up call. Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann says that the job of prophets is to free people from their numbness. Not a safe job. Not an easy job. Not a popular job. So it’s interesting, isn’t it, that the person God called for the job had neither age nor experience on his side. Scholars put Jeremiah’s age when God called him as somewhere around eighteen, a little older than our confirmands today. Some put his age as young as twelve. Perhaps not so surprising, Jeremiah is doubtful about the wisdom of God’s choice. I’m too young, he says. I don’t speak well, and given my youth and all, who exactly is going to listen to what I have to say?

God’s response is, basically, I know what I’m doing. I’ve known everything about you from before you were even born. I’ll make you the only promise you need in order to carry out the work I’ve called you to, and that is, I’ll be with you, watching over you.

We believe that God works through people, and God calls people to do God’s work. Jeremiah’s story tells us that God’s purposes for us existed before we were even born. God says to us: “I started getting you ready, and the world ready for you, long before you were born. I worked through your father and your mother, your grandfathers and grandmothers, your great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers. For generations back I have been preparing you. You are an absolutely unique person. You have unique gifts and talents that I have given you. There is no one exactly like you, and there is no one who can do exactly what you can do. Therefore, you have a special contribution to make in this particular moment, at this particular time and place. You are not an accident. You are called to serve me and work with me to make the world better in ways that only you can. If you don’t make the special contribution I have planned for you, it won’t be made.”

If you read the Scriptures, you know that God just loves to call the most unlikely people. And pretty much everyone God has ever called responded as Jeremiah did, by questioning God’s judgment. But the truth is that God does call each one of us, and sometimes the more unqualified we seem to ourselves and to others, the more interested God is in using us for something important. Maybe God likes a challenge. Maybe God has a sense of humor. Maybe God just sees in us what we can’t see in ourselves. Maybe God understands what we do not, that it’s not all about us, it’s about God who gives us the gifts and the resources we need and promises to be with us, no matter what.

A few words for ShyAnne, Colin, Olivia, Jordan, and Drew. God told Jeremiah that Jeremiah would have authority to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. These are words of great power. As I look at the world today, there is much injustice and self-centeredness that needs tearing down, and there is much peace and love that needs planting and building up. Every day you have the opportunity to teach and mentor others by the way you

live, at home, at school, in sports and other after school activities. I am especially delighted that all of you have shown an interest in helping teach and shepherd our younger children. There is no task more important than that.

Maybe you read what happened a week or so ago when the Detroit Tigers played the Cleveland Indians, with a young pitcher named Armando Galarraga pitching for the Tigers. Galarrega was about to pitch a perfect game, the first in his short career. He had retired 26 straight batters. Then the twenty-seventh batter, Jason Donald, hit a grounder and was called safe at first. Except he wasn't safe. The videotape showed the umpire had made a mistake; the batter was out. The umpire, Jim Joyce, watched the videotape after the game was over and saw his mistake. He went immediately and apologized to Galarrega. Then he told the press, "I just cost the kid a perfect game." After the apology, Galarrega told reporters he felt worse for the umpire than he did for himself. He said, "You don't see an umpire after the game come out and say, "Hey, let me tell you I'm sorry." He noted that Joyce had come straight over as soon as he knew he'd made the wrong call.

These two men showed us some important things. They showed us that you can be on the receiving end of an injustice and still react with compassion, rather than whining and complaining. They showed us that a person who makes a mistake can admit it, declare it, and apologize for it.

All of us can do these things. And if we do them enough, people will see that there is a better way to live than what we see on reality TV, and a better way to communicate than what we encounter in the blogosphere. We don't have to imitate the examples we see there. And we don't have to join the chorus of those who are frustrated with the way things are, but uninterested in committing time or energy to bringing about change.

Don't be afraid of change. I can assure you that the world as it is, is not the world that God intends. Don't settle for the way things are, just because someone says that's the way they've always been. Don't let anyone tell you that you are too young to make a difference, whether it's in the church or in the world outside. Don't believe anyone who says your contribution doesn't matter. Believe that God has claimed you and called you for purposes larger than yourself, and be ready to commit yourself to those purposes.

This is not just a message for our youth. The last time I preached on the call of Jeremiah was six years ago. I said then that if you think being young or being old disqualifies you from being called by God, think again. If you think you have any limitation God can't work with and use to God's glory, think again. And afterwards, Marilyn Cottrell, one of this congregation's beloved matriarchs, who was then in her middle seventies, came to me and said that she realized God was calling her to be a deacon. She'd said no at first because she thought she was too old, but she realized that God's promise to be with her was all she needed.

It was enough for Jeremiah. It was enough for Marilyn Cottrell, who became a wonderful deacon and touched many lives with her thoughtfulness and compassion. It is enough, for you and for me.

Thanks be to God. Amen.