

## ***Sermon***

### ***Our Inadequacy for Divine Service***

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We have traveled through the prophets this summer and today we meet, Jeremiah, known as the “weeping prophet”. Jeremiah was born about 650 B.C. in a village close to Jerusalem . His father Hilkiyah was a priest. Jeremiah’s name means “Jehovah has appointed.” He was very young when called by God to be a prophet. He was financially comfortable for he owned property and had a personal assistance .

The prophet’s background

Jeremiah was born during a troubled time in history. Great nations were struggling for control of the world. The little nation of Judah was located between the two superpowers – Assyria and Egypt. Many of the superpower’s wars were fought on Judah’s territory which caused great destruction. This made the Kings of Judah tempted to make alliances with either Babylon or Egypt but Jeremiah warned them to trust in God instead of these alliances.

The people of Judah apostatized. After the death of Hezekiah, a good king, his wicked son, Manasseh, came to the throne. Manasseh was followed by his son, Amon, also wicked. When Amon was killed, his eight year old son, Josiah, was put on the throne. Josiah was the last of the godly kings of Judah. He led the people back to God and His Law (2 Kings 22, 23) and made many reforms. During king Josiah’s reign, Jeremiah was called by God to the ministry.

The Lord told Jeremiah not to marry or have a family to spare him added grief from the impending judgment and destruction that were to come upon the land. Jeremiah is often called “the weeping prophet” because he shed tears over the sins of his people and their open apostasy against their Creator.

Thus, during Judah’s last days, Jeremiah served as God’s prophet delivering His messages of warning to avoid the judgements of God. His book of Lamentations is the climax of these prophecies. The Lamentations testify to the sure fulfillment of God’s promised judgments. Yet, their message is not without hope. Through the picture of desolation runs a hope of anticipation that the Lord will forgive and relieve the sufferings of His people. “Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old”.

Although Jeremiah presented God’s warnings for 40 years, he did not succeed in turning the people back to God. And even his own family rejected him. He was beaten and put in prison on several occasions. And, when he continued to preach God’s Word, he was finally stoned to death, according to Jewish history.

Jeremiah’s life was one of ministry, sacrifice, and faithfulness. As he delivered the unpopular messages to Israel and was rejected, he still remained true and obedient to God.

Today Jeremiah tells us, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” What profound words from Jeremiah today. You may not have been familiar with exactly who Jeremiah was or may have not known where this scripture was found in the Bible, but I’ll bet you’ve heard these words before. The belief that we are known by God and have been since before

we were conceived is a powerful message of just how precious we are to God. God spoke through Jeremiah because God wanted us to appreciate this. The word “**known**” is key in this passage. To be truly known – I sometimes wonder if anyone truly “knows” who I am. That God knows us better than even our own parents knew us. To be known means we are unique one from another intentionally. The world tries to put us all in cookie cutter lives – with single definitions of success. But this is impossible nor desirable. God creates each of us in a unique way. Trying to follow the pre-determined paths of life set forth by a single-minded world can lead to misery and a questioning of one’s self worth. But here God has given these words to Jeremiah to ensure a deep and significant affirmation that we all deserve dignity and worth.

Jeremiah continues this beautiful conversation where his role as prophet was consecrated with God. Jeremiah expresses his concern, that he is not worthy of his call and God continues by reassuring him ...”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.” Do we have this doubt within us? Do we feel inadequate at times to do God’s work? Do we truly feel set apart for a certain task or called to a specific purpose? Don’t think this text is not specifically talking to those who’ve been ordained, this is talking to us all. The Spirit has brought us all to a certain work or task. I’ve seen it firsthand since I’ve been here at Bacon, how people reach out to each other, call upon one another and work for the good of the community. But do you feel if you don’t do all that is requested from the church, that somehow you fall short in your calling? It’s important to note that God did not tell Jeremiah he was going to run a marathon, or sing songs. He was going to use his

voice to motivate and encourage God's people. And to break things down in order to build up. Each of our talents, our calling are unique and sometimes what we bring will break things down in order to build something new.

In our New Testament scripture, Jesus is facing some opposition from the leader of the synagogue because he does something new. He heals in the temple on Sabbath. And the Pharisees are caught up in their earthly definitions of what it means to keep the Sabbath holy. Jesus challenges the habits of Pharisaic work. Even they lead their ox and their donkey from the manger to water, he says. If the animals are free to drink, then how much more should a daughter of Abraham in the kingdom of God receive freedom for life? She is an heir of the covenant of promise. This freedom from bondage is Jesus' aim in his healing the woman.

This healing in the Temple of this woman who was bound by her affliction – unable to function normally in the world for 18 years – shows us that with God, we can be free from the chains that bind us in the secular world. We can be given the power we need, the strength to do God's work despite the world trying to tell us we aren't good enough or that we have to conform to the ways of this world rather than be led down an unknown path by a God who loves us, who made us for a purpose or purposes. This unnamed woman becomes a testimony to the freedom of the people of God from demonic oppression and the crippling burden of disease and anything else that robs God's people of full life.

Amen