

The Third Sunday After the Epiphany

January 24, 2016

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Jeremiah 1:4-10 – Epiphany 4

What makes up a prophet? What do you think of when you picture a prophet? Are you thinking of Moses? My guess is he would have to be one of the first we think of when we picture a prophet. Do you remember Nathan? Do Elijah and Elisha come to mind? There are those less well-known prophets like Micah, Hosea, Amos, and Joel. There are the big three, at least in terms of pages in Scripture – Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah - whom we see God call as a prophet this morning. There are prophets that are hard to ever forget like Jonah, and then in the New Testament John the Baptist. As you think about all these prophets and more in the Bible, have you figured it out? Do you see a common thread in the makeup of all of these people that have served as prophets? Is there something special that sets them apart? Are there certain gifts and unique abilities necessary for such work? Today, I want us to consider carefully this question: ***What makes a prophet of God?***

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah who was one of the priests who served in the territory of Benjamin. It was the thirteenth year in the reign of King Josiah when the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Did you listen to the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah? The Lord tells Jeremiah He has appointed him as a prophet. Did you catch Jeremiah's reaction? He said, ***"Ah, Sovereign LORD...I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."*** Jeremiah's first reaction is that he does not have what it takes. He says he doesn't know how to speak. I would say that would be a pretty important part of what makes a prophet! He says he is too young. We are not told how young Jeremiah is but he is not married and has yet to start his profession. If you look at how long Jeremiah goes on to serve he was not exaggerating when he says here that he is only a boy.

So why Jeremiah? What makes a prophet of God? In short, God does. I love how God makes it clear that He chose Jeremiah as His hand-picked prophet. He tells Jeremiah how He formed him in the womb and how even before that the Lord knew him. Before Jeremiah even took his first breath the Lord set him apart. The Lord appointed Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations. Therefore the Lord tells Jeremiah: ***"Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you."*** Jeremiah will be a prophet of the Lord for over the next forty years because that was God's plan for him. God choose Jeremiah. The Lord used Jeremiah. The Lord was with Jeremiah. That's what makes of prophet of God.

The beautiful thing is these words are not just for Jeremiah. These words are true for you when God says: ***"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."*** These words are more than the reason we are pro-life, although what an awesome reminder that life begins at conception and that every life is precious! These words are also a reminder that God has a plan for you. Do you ever feel like Jeremiah that you are not qualified?

Have you ever said that you just can't do it? Perhaps we feel like this as a student or employee, as a parent or spouse, or maybe even as a Christian. *"I can't speak...I don't know enough...I'm too young...I'm too old...I just can't handle the responsibility...I'm only a child."*

You need to remember God has put you right where you are for a reason. He will be with you and He will equip you with whatever you need for whatever role He gives you in life. He chose you at your baptism. He called you and set you apart through the Gospel, the good news about Jesus. So when you feel you can't do it anymore. When you start to think you're life is not important and you are wondering what purpose you are serving. When you are confused or scared, then listen to Jeremiah tell you the same thing the Lord told him. Probably some of the most quoted and popular words of Jeremiah are from chapter 29 when Jeremiah speaks these words and promises of the Lord: ***"For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*** God has a plan for you just as He had a plan for Jeremiah.

What makes a prophet of God is the same thing that makes a child of God – God does. That is true of every prophet and child of God. God chooses. God picks. God calls. There is another common thread of every prophet the Lord has ever called. Listen closely to these words: ***"Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*** In a very visual and vivid way the Lord shows Jeremiah the job of every prophet. Jeremiah will speak the words God puts into His mouth. The work of every prophet is to simply say this is what God says. Jeremiah is to speak the word of the Lord. The Word will do the work.

We also have a brief summary of Jeremiah's work as a prophet. How could we best summarize Jeremiah's 40 plus year ministry of the Word? I'll just say that as Jeremiah speaks God's Word the results brought tears to his eyes many more times than it brought a smile to his face. No doubt God called Jeremiah to do much uprooting and tearing down, destroying and overthrowing. Yet, not everyone in Israel rejected the word of God. Not everyone scoffed and ridiculed and persecuted this prophet of God. As Jeremiah spoke God's Word some hearts and lives were changed as God used this prophet to also build and to plant. So what makes a prophet of God? The Word of God does. For this is the language of every prophet of God. A prophet speaks for God.

So think again of every prophet you remember in the Bible. Think about how God called and used every prophet to speak His Word. Then don't forget the prophet of all prophets. For: ***"in the past God spoke...through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1).*** Jesus was not like Jeremiah, or Moses, or Isaiah, or any of us who sometimes offer God excuses why we can't do the things God calls us to do. Jesus never said, *"I'm only a child"* or *"Send someone else to do it."* Jesus responded to God the Father without hesitation saying: *"Send me!"* Jesus was not like every other prophet, or any of us, because Jesus never once failed to say this is what God says – even when it meant people wanted to throw Him off of a cliff in his own hometown.

Jesus served as the perfect prophet because Jesus came to be our perfect Savior. That includes not just living for us but dying for us too. That is what Jesus did for Jeremiah and for all people. The cross is where Jesus gave up His life for you. Now your sin is gone. Now all your excuses are forgotten. And because God always does what He says in His Word, Jesus rose again to assure you that you too will live forever.

So what makes a prophet of God? How does Jesus still speak this good news to people today? Look into the mirror. See a person whom God has chosen and called to be His child. See a person to whom the Lord has given His Word. ***“Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.”*** So I pray we go, my friends, with His Word, confident God has a plan for each one of us. Amen.