

WHY JEREMIAH

In the days before kindergarten gave pupils their first taste of learning, a teacher gave a first grader a gift he would use every day of his life. She taught him to read. The teacher, whose name was Nanny Arbuckle, "loved" her pupils into learning and taught them the joy of school. In a way, though, she taught them too well. Their attachment to her left them terribly fearful of 2nd Grade. Imagine their surprise and chagrin to be called by the school system to move on to another grade -- a new class -- a challenge they had not imagined and for which they felt unprepared. Many panicked when they realized Nanny would not be their teacher forever and that they would have to move up to a new class.

Of course, Nanny and the pupils' parents reassured them, the students were promoted to the next grade, and it all worked out. The experience, though, gives us a tiny glimmer of understanding, a sense of what Jeremiah felt as a young man when he was called by the Lord to be a prophet to the nations.

Imagine poor Jeremiah - minding his own business, when suddenly God barged into his life. Calling him to be God's prophet, to speak God's word to the people. And he was not called to be just any old prophet. God would set him "over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Jeremiah resisted. He was reluctant to obey this call, but God wouldn't take a simple, "No," or any kind of "No."

So God and Jeremiah engaged in a little dialogue.

[Needed: two people w/ mikes in computer room]

Jeremiah: Hey! I'm minding my own business and along comes God with his list of things for me to do. More headaches! Why is that?

God: "You're the one, Jeremiah - I knew it even before you were born - I chose you then to speak for me to the nations. ."

Jeremiah: Who me? You must be mistaken. I'm way too young!

God: Come on Jeremiah - You're not too young!

Jeremiah: "And speak to the nations - why I can't even speak in public.

God: Jeremiah, If I tell you to go and speak to someone, then go!
And when I tell you what to say, don't leave out a word!

Jeremiah: Come on Lord, give me a break - I can't do this - please don't ask me...

God: Sorry Jeremiah, the job is yours. And I promise to be with you and keep you safe, so don't be afraid.

Jeremiah: "How can I ever accomplish everything you what me to? I have no idea what

I'm doing! [pauses then starts to mumble and grumble under his breath]
There's no way of getting out of this, is there?

God: "No, Jeremiah"

Jeremiah: "I have this friend, Fred [pauses] - he would be perfect for the job!

God: "No, Jeremiah"

Jeremiah: "But Lord..... [pauses] [deep breath] [softly in wonder]

Lord, you touched me.

God: Relax Jeremiah. , "I will give you words to say, and I will send you with authority to speak to the nations for me."

Jeremiah: "Oh, all right Lord.... But this is a really big job for one person.

[pauses]

Hey! I've got an idea!

Can I at least take the "Initiative" and recruit a few others to help.

God: "Jeremiah, I like your initiative!"

"And so I will bless you with a future filled with hope - a future of success, and not of suffering.

Way to go, Jeremiah! What initiative! This dialogue was critical for the prophet Jeremiah's decision.

Perhaps we should pause to wonder why God seems to have continually chosen the most unwilling character to do His will. Why would God have enlisted so young and inexperienced a person as Jeremiah for so awesome a task?

The obvious answer is that he was called for qualities other than gifted speech. We can be certain that Jeremiah's success rested, not within himself, but on God's word and God's strength, as God promised this reluctant prophet.

All the power and success of Jeremiah's life resulted from his new relationship with God. As his dialogue with God continued, as God taught him what to tell the people in God's name, God empowered Jeremiah with the strength and courage to do the work he was given to do.

Jeremiah was able to move ahead into the new day because he learned to trust God's assurance. God said that, despite whatever hesitations Jeremiah might have felt, He absolutely wanted him to be a prophet and would support and sustain him. God would love Jeremiah as would no other.

God did not limit to Biblical times, the blowing of God's spirit among His people. God's spirit moves among us in our day as well. So we might ask, "Are we, too, called by God as Jeremiah was called?"

How often are we reluctant to heed God's call? We can always find a reason not to continue the journey of faith or the commitment to which we feel God calling us:

- I'm too old or too young.
- I don't speak well or know enough.
- I'm too busy.
- I can't do that.
- It must not really be God calling.
- I can serve, but not now, maybe later.

The key to Jeremiah overcoming his fear lies in the continuing dialogue with God. This is true for us, too.

If we only have a monologue, all we will have is the chance to do all the speaking and all the listening -listening mostly to our own ignorance of life's greater callings and our limited vision of what challenges God may have in store for us in His kingdom.

Like Jeremiah, we all called to continue the dialogue. We are all called into a relationship with God that is just as challenging as Jeremiah's.

God tells us first, as He did the prophet of old, that He will be with us, and will sustain us. God will love us as no other. We can rest assured of His support, guidance and strength. God will sustain us as we seek His purpose for us here in this place.

Through our baptism, God calls us to serve the world, to love and nurture what is good; to mend and help transform, through His power, what is weak or distorted and to live lives worthy of Christ..

Some of us will respond to God's call eagerly. Others may be hesitant to answer - just like Jeremiah.

A daily dialogue with God, allows us to respond positively as Jeremiah did because we, too, are assured that the God who calls us remains forever with us to sustain us.

This living God, in whose name we are baptized, continually speaks to us, through the church, through the Scriptures and Sacraments, through our prayers, through the voice of the Spirit. God speaks to us at unexpected moments: through the created world around us; through the hands and voices of other people; and even in the silences of trials and unanswered prayers.

The God who has called us is always with us, speaking, if we will listen and, if we will accept it. God, who is always there for us, will give us His love and support and nourishment, with the same grace that inspired Jeremiah.

Despite any hesitation and uncertainty, we can learn from Jeremiah's dialogue with God to be as steadfast as we discover the direction He is leading us.

God had a plan for Jeremiah. Guess what? God has a plan for our church family. He has a plan for each one of us here today. You - and You - and You and Me. Quite frankly, I wonder what it is?

We look forward to working with Ruth Ann Christopher who is our liaison with Presbytery as we move forward thru the next three years to what we hope will be a revitalized congregation.

God's mission needs a church, and we will be working together to answer some questions that will be key to our survival in today's world, such as "What is God doing here in Summit Hill? "How is God calling us to accomplish his plan?" "What part do I play in His plan?"

If our church is to continue to be faithful to God's mission , each and every one of us will need to be diligent in our pursuit of "The Jeremiah Initiative;" and in the process we will become a more caring, loving congregation with a mission to live, breathe and do God's will, every moment of every day of every year of our lives here in this place. Amen

Please join me as we sing together "Lord, I want to be a Christian."