

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Jeremiah Was A Prophet...Never Understood a Single Word He Said



Part I. Hobby Lobby and Proof texting

I will admit that in the age of shop local,
and shop sustainable and support small business,
I go to Hobby Lobby.

I buy the cheap picture frames
because they are almost always 50 % off
and I'm not discriminatory;
I like a bargain and that picture frame
is probably only worth \$7.99.

And I might have procured
a Christmas ornament as early as September,
because also it was on sale.

I've bought canvases, paint, fake plants,
even garland for our mantel.

It's surprising all the things
I don't need in that store
that end up coming home with me.

I'm willing to bet
that I am not the only one here
that can relate.

I lamented when it moved from 127
all the way across town near Hwy 40.

I usually recognize
the instrumental song
softly playing on the store speakers
as a hymn or recent song, we've sung in Kairos.

And though I cannot claim to have ever seen it;
I don't doubt that if you wanted it,
you could find a faux wooden plaque in Hobby Lobby

with the words of Jeremiah scripted on it,
*Before I formed you in the womb,
I knew you,*
so that it can hang in your kitchen.

Hobby Lobby and other enterprising businesses
are making good money off what,
Biblical snobs and academic types might call,
a little bit of proof texting.

Proof texting is when you lift
something out of scripture
and use it incorrectly
or solely for your own agenda.
Now I'm not necessarily implying
that Hobby Lobby
or Lifeway Bookstores
or any other place,
by using these words for living room décor,
are proof texting.

But the fact that you can get
almost anything with a verse printed in cool graphics
and use for decoration
or as mere sentiment,
well that might borderline
on using it out of context.

We proof text all the time.

The more famous words of Jeremiah 29
are a great example—

*For I know the plans I have for you,
says the Lord, plans for you welfare and not for harm,
to give you a future with hope.*

It was probably on a card or book

our high school graduates recently received.

And while yes, it is worth tucking that
into hearts when we are anxious about our future
—it is also worth noting that in context,
that scripture isn't about an individual;

it is directed toward the nation of Israel,
toward God's people about a hope
for their future
as a people
who were scattered and defeated.

We all have points we'd like to back up
with something we consider authoritative
and so, we pull out scripture All. The. Time.
I bring this up for Jeremiah
because it points to two needs, I think we have.

One is our need, to be intimately known by God,
inside and out.
And the other need is to feel
as though we matter
and have something of worth
to do in life.
I do believe
that we are known by God
in ways beyond
our wildest comprehension.

When the Psalms declare
that we are fearfully and wonderfully made;
that God knows us inside and out;
knit us together in our mother's wombs;
when God says,
Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,
I believe that.

But I believe it,
about everything single thing in the universe.
And I believe it about every single person
to take a breath.
I don't know that I really believe
that God micromanages circumstances,
but I can say
that standing here looking at all of us,
that there is no doubt

that something greater at work
than we can fully know.
I know that sounds so cliché.
We are so different and yet so alike.
So creaturely—fragile and temperamental,
and yet spontaneously creative and joyful.
When you think about how many things
came together so that
there are human beings walking around
coming up with ideas like donuts holes
and solar panels and Hulu,
it is staggering
how beautifully and wonderfully
we are made.

But I also believe
that we all can feel insignificant.
We all know that life is fragile
and we want what we do
with and for others to matter.

In a New York Times article,
there was much lamenting
over the amount of autobiographies
that have flooded the literary market.

Much of these autobiographies
have been written by someone
who married a millionaire
or won America's Got Talent.
“The author of this article [is critical
noting] that in a recent survey,
something like 70% of the people who were asked
thought their own life story was worth telling.
To this author that statistic
was [just] more evidence
that modern people
are altogether too full of themselves.

A week later, though,
there was a highly insightful “Letter to the Editor”

that picked up on this to say,
“This article claimed that 70% of people
think their life story is worth telling.
So that means that 30%
think they have no story
worth telling.
How sad.”¹



Pat II. Once Upon A Time...

In the song *Glorious*
by the hip hop artist, Macklemore,
there is a line where he says,
“I hear you die twice,
once when they bury you in the grave/
and the second time
is the last time
someone mentions your name.”²

How sad is right.

I hope everyone here
realizes they have a story to tell.
And whether your story starts out
with *once upon a time...*
or *on a stormy night in January...*
or *it was the summer of '69...*
your story is—and we see this in Jeremiah
—your story is intimately
tied up in God’s grand story.

“Before I formed you in the womb,

¹ Scott Hoezee, https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/epiphany-4c/?type=old_testament_lectionary

² <https://genius.com/Macklemore-glorious-lyrics>

I knew you,
and before you were born,
I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”
I have *consecrated* you;
and *appointed* you as a prophet to the nations...
that gets left off the wooden placard,
doesn't it?

What is it like, hearing God say,
I've appointed you
to be a prophet to the nations?
Seems a little removed to us,
doesn't it?
I mean, who do we even consider
to be prophetic these days?
Most of us don't believe
the street preachers and prophets
with their posters of doom and gloom messages.



There is a house in our neighborhood
with a permanent yard sign
quoting the prophet Isaiah,
“I will punish the wicked for their iniquity.”

I'll wager that that one
isn't going to make it
into the Hobby Lobby home décor,
at least I hope not.

And my guess is that most of us
don't really feel like God
has appointed us to be anything special,

let alone to be prophets...
and yet to assume
that we are not called
to be a prophetic voice
might be bit like proof texting—
ignoring our own context.

To reduce this passage
to be one that only speaks to Jeremiah
highlights his specialness
at the cost of ignoring ours.

And Jeremiah's call, though unique to him,
does invite us to say something,
to do something,
to make our lives something of worth
in of the story of who we are:
because of another prophetic voice.

In The Heidelberg Catechism,
a historic confession of our church,
the question is asked,
Why is he called the Christ,
and *Why are we called a Christian.*

Christ, the catechism answers,
“refers to the fact that Jesus was anointed **into**
and fulfilled the Old Testament offices
of prophet, priest and king.

So, when the Catechism asks,
“Why are you called a Christian?”
here's the answer.
“Because I am a member of Christ by faith,
and thus, a partaker of his anointing...” (Q and A 31 and 32)

We are called to be partakers of
his anointing be prophets, priests, and kings.”³

It's like Paul says,
because we are in Christ,
we have the same mind as Christ

³ Stan Mast, https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-16c-2/?type=old_testament_lectionary

and the same heart as Christ.

And that means
we have the same story to tell
as Christ.

30% of us feel
that we don't have a story to tell.

I want you to know that you do.

Because of who Christ is,
we are consecrated,
we share the appointment
of prophet to the nations with him.

You have a grand story to tell.

I read that

Christians should proselytize,
meaning share the story,
not because we think
we can change everybody.
We should proselytize
because the gospel being shared
is the ultimate act of love,

[we share the story]

because we think we can love everybody.⁴

We have been set aside

to tell the story,
to share our story,
of how being in relationship with this God
changes us
and how we see the world.

Prophets speak a word from the Lord
to a particular place and time.

They don't predict the future
or explain what will happen
how God will end it all.

Prophets look at the world around them

⁴ Criss Jami, Healology

and know that because of Christ in them,
there is assurance
that every person
deserves the story of love in their lives.



Part III. Be Careful: Because of at least 4 Verbs. Be Hopeful: Because of 2

I hope that knowing
we share the same appointment as Christ
I hope that is empowering.
But as bold as you might feel,
as ready as you might be,
I offer a word of caution.
Jeremiah was a prophet,
but he had a hard word to deliver.
It seems the people never understood
a single word he said (see what I did there?)

God tells him,
“Now, I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you
over nations and over kingdoms,
(and here’s where it gets tough)
to pluck up and pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.”

No wonder God has to tell Jeremiah,
don’t be afraid
I will be with you and will deliver you.

These are not verbs
I’d want to proclaim;
pluck up, pull down,
destroy, overthrow!
In fact, Jeremiah’s prophetic career

is long and hard.
He's ridiculed, beaten,
thrown in a cistern, and imprisoned.
I think when you have truth to tell,
especially during hard times,
you shouldn't expect roses confetti.
Remember when Jesus
weeps over Jerusalem in Luke saying,
"Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
the city that kills the prophets
and stones those who are sent to it."

Who's ready to sign up
to receive a word from the Lord?
Who's ready to be a prophet to the nations?

There's no escaping our call.

Our call.

Later on, Jeremiah says
the word of the Lord is like a fire,
shut up in his bones
and he cannot hold it in.

We too, cannot hold it in,
we cannot hold back
just because it is hard.

In Christ, we are appointed
to be prophets to the nations.

We too, in Christ,
are called to speak a word from the Lord
that may pluck up, pull down,
destroy and overthrown.

I think we all can agree that,
that is hard work;
it is exhausting work.

But it is also necessary work.
There are systems
that need to be overthrown.

There are policies and prejudices
that need to be destroyed.

There are, even within the church,
old traditions to be pulled down
and new fads to be plucked up.

Our call as a community of faith
is to be in discernment, together,
about the word the Lord gives us,
the word we are given to speak
for our time and place.

Our story of love demands that
we look at the world and declare that
good news can be a reality
even when it seems impossible.

And yet, don't forget
that even when the word is harsh,
when the verbs are
almost too much to swallow,
God's prophetic word in us

also, also, also,

promises to be a word
that builds and plants.
God will not leave us without hope;
without gospel,
without good news,
without thinking that there is
word and story
that makes it possible
to love everyone.

Do not say,
I am only a boy;
I'm only a child;
I'm only a 6th grader;
I'm only a mother;

I'm only a furniture sales rep;
I'm only...*me*.

On a day when we have asked
for blessing over these backpacks
and students, teachers and parents
—do not say I am only...this.

We are empowered and never alone.

God is with us.

This is our assurance
that we can carry the Word of the Lord
and speak to our time and place.

Another prophet claims
that the word of the Lord
endures forever.

And I suppose, that we could say
even Jeremiah hasn't died twice.

For all these thousands of years later,
we are still saying his name,
remembering his call and claiming ours.

Long live the prophetic word of our Lord.