

Sermon #1,043: Jeremiah 1:1-10

10-6-13 (19th Sunday After Trinity), Bethany-Princeton MN

DIVINELY CALLED TO PREACH

Prayer: Almighty and gracious God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have taught us that we should pray You to send forth laborers into Your harvest: Of Your infinite mercy, give us true ministers of Your Word, and put Your saving Gospel in their hearts and on their lips, so that they may truly fulfill Your command and preach nothing contrary to Your holy Word, to the end that we, being warned, instructed, nurtured, comforted, and strengthened by Your heavenly Word, may do those things which are well-pleasing to You and profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

This reading is one that I use in catechism instruction. To answer the question, "How can the words of these men be the Word of God?" we look at Jeremiah 1. Jeremiah reports the LORD's words to him: **"Whatever I command you, you shall speak,"** and: **"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."** Because Jeremiah wrote two books of the Bible, from these words it is obvious that they are Jeremiah's words and they are God's words, at the same time.

But what this says about God's written Word is actually a secondary application of these verses. For when it comes to what God says to Jeremiah here, Jeremiah's writing-down of God's Word would come later. Preaching it would come first. Certainly Jeremiah would speak with his pen too, but God first says He is putting his words in Jeremiah's mouth. This is about Jeremiah's divine call.

Jeremiah did not have everything that we preachers have today. Jesus had not come yet and fulfilled all the prophecies. Half of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament were yet to be written. The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were still in the future. God's people being called Christians, gathering in congregations, building churches in the shape of the cross, praying in Jesus' name, praying the Lord's Prayer, and going into all the world and to people

of all nations with the Gospel all were not part of Jeremiah's ministry. Even the way he was called by God was different. He was called by God directly, without human means; he says only, "**the word of the LORD came to me,**" whereas every pastor now is called by God, but by means of the congregation.

So there are differences in the details, simply because Jeremiah lived before Christ. But in the most important sense, there is no difference between what a pastor is and does, and what Jeremiah was and did.

The New Testament tells us that a pastor is sent by God, even when a congregation issues the call and he accepts it. Just as the New Testament says of the ascended Lord Jesus that *He Himself [gives] some to be pastors ...* (Ep 4:11), and Jesus says to the apostles and to every pastor, "*As the Father has sent Me, just so I send you*" (Jn 20:21), God used the very same words with Jeremiah to show that He Himself was sending him, for He said: "**'You shall go to all to whom I send you ... Do not be afraid, for I am with you,' says the LORD.**"

So the first thing that is the same is that it is God Himself sending each pastor just as He did here with young Jeremiah. But the second thing we see that is the same is the question of what is happening when the pastor speaks.

We go back to the words by which we learn to trust that God's Word is true. We learn what to believe also about the pastor's words, when God tells Jeremiah: "**Whatever I command you, you shall speak,**" and after that when Jeremiah says: "**Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth ...'**" This is true of every pastor when He speaks God's words. He is speaking, but really God is.

This is not just true of the sermon. But in baptism, when the pastor speaks the words, "*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" as he sprinkles water, not only is the baby baptized by that pastor, but, as Luther said,

Christ is the true Baptizer; the pastor is only the mouth and the hands that Christ uses. And when the pastor says, *"I forgive you in the stead and by the command of Christ,"* the words of the absolution are Christ's words, Christ is the one forgiving. It is still true that only God can forgive sins, but He has *"given this power to men,"* not that He gives up doing it Himself, for He Himself is doing it through the speaking that He commands the church to do, through its called pastors.

It is important for us to know all of this about the divine call of a pastor: important to know that it is God Himself sending the pastor, important to know that when the pastor is preaching, absolving, etc., God is the one speaking.

But knowing this does not make for smooth sailing. Even when you know this, there are difficulties when it comes to preaching the Word, and also hearing the Word. There is a reason that there is a commandment about this, and it is the threatening Law that has to tell you to not despise the preaching of the Word, that you must struggle with your sinful flesh in order to gladly hear the Word.

You see that reflected in the Lord's words to the young prophet. Jeremiah expresses reluctance to do this job because of his young age and inexperience, but also because he knows that in being **"a prophet to the nations"** and with the things he must say as God's representative it would not be well received.

So there is a reason that God first has to preach the Law to Jeremiah, **"Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you,"** and there is a reason that Jeremiah needs the comforting Gospel that God also preaches to him: **"Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you."**

The reason, in both cases, is that Jeremiah's hearers are not the only ones with a sinful nature. He has one too. It comes out in his fear of preaching an unpopular message, his fear of displeasing men and what they could do to him. His

fears were not unjustified; later on he had to survive plots to kill him! Jeremiah was indeed actually persecuted by the people he preached to.

This is a grim but real portrayal of the pastoral office. The fact is that nobody's sinful flesh likes to hear the Law and be condemned for sins that sometimes you don't want to repent of. At least your sinful flesh doesn't. Pastors know that part of their job involves saying things that are hard for people to hear. That part of the job is preaching the Law. It's as God says later in this passage, **"to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down,"** what God does with sin and everything it accomplishes. The preaching of the Law is for destroying sinful pride and exposing sin's ugliness in people's lives.

Pastors don't enjoy doing this. They're in this **"to build and to plant."** Men become pastors because they want to comfort sinners with the Gospel, they want to bring Good News. Nobody becomes a pastor because he wants to be the Bad Guy and enjoys pointing out people's sins. When they speak the hard truth to people, sometimes their hearers will not accept it, offer excuses, or make it clear that they don't care what the preacher has to say. Sometimes they leave. This is the opposite of what the pastor wants. Out of fear of the results, a pastor is tempted to be silent and not speak the hard truth. But God doesn't say to Jeremiah in his fearfulness, "I understand." God speaks the Law to the sinful flesh. Here it is the command: **"You shall go to [them]!"**

God does not tolerate the preacher's fears. Do you know why? Because it is sinful fear. The First Commandment teaches that we are to fear God above all things. Fearing anything more than God is idolatry. The fears that lead a pastor to say less than he should, avoid rebuking someone of sin, or adjust his message so nobody will have any bad feelings, are sins against the First Commandment.

Every vocation has temptations and sins that are particular to that vocation. For pastors, one of these is the desire to be praised which is an aspect of sinful pride. It is the desire to be popular, and this is endangered whenever he has to rebuke someone of a sin. The devil uses that, makes the pastor afraid of upsetting people, to keep him from speaking such things so that the devil can keep Christians in slavery to the will of the Old Adam. Not preaching the Law against sin, resulting in people not repenting of sin, achieves the devil's goal.

The pastor needs to repent for indulging these fears and failing to preach the Law as well as the Gospel. Hearers of the Word need to repent when they make it difficult for the pastor to preach the Law, encouraging such fears.

But while this makes life in the Church look and feel like anything but smooth sailing, the Lord has given us something even better: In the Gospel, He *"makes the rough places smooth"* (Lk 3:5), as He promised about the great preacher John the Baptist. And so the Gospel promise in these verses is so good: **"Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you."** He says to Jeremiah: "Fear not." That's what the Gospel is, a great "Fear-Not" statement. When you ask why you should fear not, the Answer is: Jesus, Himself.

Jesus is the one who makes the rough places smooth. Jesus is the one who obeyed the Third Commandment perfectly about hearing the Word, and also obeyed the Second Commandment perfectly, the one about speaking His Word and using His Name rightly in worship. Jesus became the perfect hearer of the Word, for you. Jesus became the perfect preacher of the Word, to atone for the sins of every pastor. If you think about every time you or someone else has been guilty of despising the pure preaching of His Word, treating it lightly or speaking against the divinely called pastor, and all the times that your pastor or other pastors have spoken or acted wrongly, have not testified strongly to the truth or

said too much, misspoke or hurt unnecessarily with their words, then see how Jesus completely cleared everyone of the guilt of all those sins with His blood.

It is not just what He did in the past, however. As He said to Jeremiah, "... **for I am with you, to deliver you,**" it is important what He is doing now. His presence, His real presence with us in divine worship, is vitally important!

He is our Prophet, Priest, and King, and as our Prophet He Himself is still preaching the words of eternal life, but now it is by sending pastors, and He is with them in all that they say and do as pastors, He is the one who is actually preaching, baptizing, and forgiving sins with their mouths, and also it is His faithfulness alone by which they can be considered faithful pastors.

I can't tell you how comforting it is to me as a pastor – and it should be comforting to you as the congregation benefiting from this -- that Jesus Himself is with My mouth, and even in My mouth, to do the speaking for me. Last Sunday we heard how Isaiah's "unclean lips" were cleansed in God's presence. Here in Jeremiah 1, again we hear that God, whose essence and substance is holy, touched Jeremiah's unholy mouth. So in the means of grace it is not a small gift that Christ Jesus Himself, in His very body and blood, touches our lips and comes into our mouths, and in the preaching of the Word that He Himself goes from my mouth to your ears. I as a pastor desperately need this, for whatever is not perfect in my words to be removed, and for my mouth and words to be made clean by the holy blood of Jesus. You need this too, as you are called to confess His truth, to pray, praise and give thanks, to speak the truth in love to one another, and to teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns, as the Word of Christ dwells in you richly in all wisdom by the hearing of His Word.

As we worship together He is taking away our fears and making us confident to speak the honor of His holy name. Amen!