

Placed Words

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Sunday, August 25, 2019

Imagine the scene with me, there you are standing before God, not in metaphysical scene but truly standing in the presence of the Lord, the God of all creation. God's presence is so strong you can feel it emanating around you and through you. After a moment, God looks upon you and says, "*I appoint you prophet to the nations.*"

How would you respond? I would like to think that I would jump at the chance, and be fully willing to accept this monumental task, but honestly, I may respond as Jeremiah did.

For Jeremiah, he said that he couldn't accept because he was "*too young*"

For me, it may be that I am not serious enough or that I lied one time back in 4th grade.

For you, maybe you think you are too old or too young or maybe you don't think you have the right degrees or perhaps you think because you struggle with anxiety or depression that you cannot be qualified.

Whatever the reason be for you, I can say that stories like the call of Jeremiah were ones that I always gravitated toward as a kid. I gravitated toward them, because I found myself often speaking similar things about myself. I can remember as a child recounting the words of my bullies from school, saying that I was too fat.

I was too fat to ever find someone to love me or I was too fat to ever be athletic or this that and the other. These were the stories that I was told by many bullies in my life as a child. I can remember so often trying to keep a happy face on while being ridiculed by classmates. I can't remember what the catalyst was, but I remember that my breaking point was one day after school my mom picked me up and could tell something was wrong, but I tried to avoid the conversation. I tried to avoid revealing the pain I felt. It wasn't till I got home that I finally cracked, and out came the tears. I remember sitting on the stairs of my house crying and recounting how I was told that I was too fat and how I believed them. I personally never thanked my Mom for how she showed Christ like compassion to a console a crying 3rd grader.

This is my story, and yours may be different. Maybe your story is similar to mine in that someone mocked your physical appearance deeming it less than or maybe your story is different, and you found the negative voices both internal and external mocking you for your interests or your dreams.

I believe that it is easy to find comfort in the call of Jeremiah, because in the story despite Jeremiah's best efforts God still looks upon him and says

“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;

for you shall go to all to whom I send you,

and you shall speak whatever I command you.

Do not be afraid of them,

for I am with you to deliver you...”

This affirmation though comforting does reveal a potentially dangerous road, because what happens when it isn't enough. What happens when we begin to question if we are even worth the company of God or God's love.

The short answer to this is that you are deserving of God's love and there is nothing that will change that. Today as you are sitting in these pews you are loved. I firmly believe that to my very core, but I believe that it does each of us a disservice if I leave us there. I believe that though the love of God is strong, we must be given the chance to dwell with our laundry list of reasons and we must be willing to stand in support of our neighbors who may be struggling with their own.

So, before we move forward, I think it is important to affirm our neighbors, so I want you all to tell your neighbors that they are doing great and that they are loved!

Thank you everyone for indulging the affirmer in me, but now what?

Here we are left with our own personal feelings of shortcoming our own list of "Too this or that which exclude us."

Where do we go?

Well we head to the synagogue. We head to the place that was and still remains to be the epicenter of religious life and worship in Jewish society. It is a place that Jesus could often be found in teaching or

preaching or just simply being with the people. Today's occasion though is a little different for as we stand in the synagogue a woman approaches the holy place.

A woman who the texts says has been bound by a demon for 18 years making it so she is unable to stand up straight left permanently bent.

This woman I can imagine was no stranger to feelings of judgement or prejudice. I am sure that she experienced a fair share in those long 18 years. The text doesn't outright say this, but I can imagine that many people in the synagogue saw the woman and whispered rude remarks while others may have simply tried to avoid her all together for fear of catching whatever it was that she has.

But, what about Jesus, how did he respond to the woman? Well as a wise preaching professor once told me, look to the verbs. As the woman enters the synagogue the text says that Jesus "*Saw her...*" and "*Called to her...*"

Jesus saw and he called. He did not speak malice when he saw her, but rather he called to her.

While standing out on the playground as kid being told how my physical appearance would never change and my weight made me unlovable or while I stand as an adult still wondering if those bullies were right, what I would have given to felt truly seen...

Or at least seen for more than my weight that is...

I can imagine Jeremiah would have loved to have felt seen for more than his age.

What about you? I am sure that each of you would love to be seen for more than something either it be the reality of what people see or maybe it is just the narrative you have convinced yourself of that people see.

Well friends, the comforting thing is that Christ does see us, look back at Christ's interaction with the woman. Jesus refers to the woman as a woman first, and though I would love for her to be given a name. I believe this speaks volumes nonetheless, because to the woman who even the author spends a lot of time describing her ailment is simply a woman, human being to Christ not an ailment, shortcoming, or doubt.

Christ does not see the ailment, but he sees the woman

Christ does the same for us. We are seen and loved by Christ.

We all have our list. We all have those voices that sit in the back of our mind that remind us constantly of those shortcomings that we have, but we are loved by a God that calls us by name without a second thought of this list. We are seen by a loving God that sees our doubts and our too whatevers and doesn't leave, but rather like God told Jeremiah God tells us "I will be with you" We are not abandoned in those moments, but rather we are seen and we are comforted.

But Fort Hill Presbyterian Church, we cannot believe that there will not be times in our own lives or the lives of others that believing that God is with us comes as easily and that my friends is where I believe we are called to step in. We are called to respond as Jesus responded.

We called to see those who question, see who they are, and be present. This can be a scary thing to do, because as Dr. Brene Brown puts it to be able to make an impactful connection we must be willing to connect with something in ourselves for rarely does a response make something better, but rather it is connection makes something better. We

must be willing sit with our neighbors in their doubts as well as our own in order to make connection, and in order to live a life that mirrors the life of Christ.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.