

Stop Protesting – Accept Your Fate

Nearly every person I know who has accepted God's call has done so after a lot of protesting. We see many examples in the Bible – we've got Noah, who has absolutely NO idea how to build an ark, and yet he does.

We've got Moses who insists his brother Aaron would be a better choice. We've got Jonah who's told to go to Nineveh to deliver bad news and initially protests and runs away.

There's also today's example from Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is both called and anointed in today's passage. In verse 5 we read:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’

God set Jeremiah apart, even before his birth, that he would be a prophet.

Verse 9 begins: Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth;

and the Lord said to me,

‘Now I have put my words in your mouth.

See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,

to pluck up and to pull down,

to destroy and to overthrow,

to build and to plant.’

When God calls, you answer. And in case you need a reminder, when God calls you the answer is always Yes. Even if it takes many years, as it did in my case.

Jeremiah gave a similar answer as Moses, in that he was not a good speaker. God countered that Jeremiah would be given the words.

Jeremiah protested that he was “just a boy”. And that word has a very wide level of interpretation. The Hebrew word used “יחיד” “naar” means boy. It also means youth and child.

This same word "יחיד" "naar" is used in the book of Exodus to refer to Moses as an infant being drawn from the water and to refer to Joshua who was the young aide of Moses.

Which means Jeremiah could have been any age between 4 and 17 years of age, given his command of language.. Still young by today's standards, but not so much in his day. Remember the general lifespan in that time was approximately 30 years.

I consulted several scholars to ascertain Jeremiah's age when he received God's call and was anointing. Not surprisingly, they all disagreed. By definition the age of reason is age 7. The age of consent varies from 12 - 16. The age of majority varies from 16 - 18. And so, for argument's sake, let's say Jeremiah was 12.

His protestations make sense to me. He feels he's too young. That's fair. He's concerned he won't know what to say. That's also fair. How many of us have been in that position when we feel completely unqualified and unprepared to take on a task we are asked to do.

Because of my previous work, volunteering and education I'm good in times of crises. I stay calm, assess the situation and do what needs to be done. Yet I find sitting at a person's bedside at home or in hospital difficult because I'm not sure what to say that won't be inappropriate. The truth is I'm not good at small talk. And it creates great anxiety when I'm expected to participate in small talk, so I avoid those kinds of situations as often as I can.

I appreciate Jeremiah's protestations. Most Churches want pastors who are twenty-five years old with thirty years experience. Now I KNOW that's not the case with our beloved Parish, right? Yet it can be difficult in your first or settlement parish when you are decades younger than your congregation with little or no experience and you are expected to lead a congregation you do not yet know and have not yet established a relationship.

Have you ever been tasked with speaking to a family who are waiting on news from a surgeon regarding their loved one who is undergoing life-altering surgery? Have you ever been in that situation with your own family?

Hospital waiting rooms can be veritable landmine areas, negotiating what to say and deciding what not to say. Do you dare take a break and go for refreshment and a stretch or do you stay put? With the current COVID protocols in most hospitals, you cannot leave the bedside for fear you may not be allowed to return. There are not waiting areas open as they once were, so most waiting is now alone in isolation or may need to take place away from the hospital itself.

Jeremiah was a tender-hearted man and has often been referred to as the "weeping prophet". The Reverend John Bohaczek writes ""His message was one of hope and warning. The Israelites were getting away from their destiny and God was trying to call them back. Jeremiah was faithful when God gave him a strong word and challenged him to execute that word. They called him the Weeping Prophet because his heart was so tender." (www.oaoa.com)

Jeremiah was dealing with difficult times and yet his message was always one of hope. Quite often when I'm having a difficult time or struggling with my sermon for Sunday I will pick up one of the many touchstones that sit on my desk to help me reframe my focus. This is the weeping yogi. And this is his story.

The tale of the weeping yogi or weeping Buddha has been around for centuries. It goes like this. The Warrior Buddha, with campaigns left to wage, left his home for many years. He left his son with it. When he came back, years later, another battle was waged against an adversary at home. Buddha wore a mask and the other warrior wore a mask. Neither warrior ever got the best of the other. After facing each other on numerous occasions, the Buddha finally killed the other in battle. After the victorious warrior removed the mask of his now deceased opponent, he realized he had just killed his long lost son.

It was then that the warrior Buddha became the weeping Buddha and renounced violence. He proclaimed the virtues of helping the young, sick, and old; that compassion is the highest of all virtues.

The weeping Buddha statue is symbolic of the warrior suffering the anguish and pain of killing his very own son. Many people will use the weeping Buddha while meditating.

By rubbing his back you are allowing him to absorb your pain. You are giving your worries, fears, hurt, and pain to the weeping Buddha, allowing him to take your pain and the pain of all humankind so that nobody else will suffer from sorrow as he did. (The Open Mind Centre)

I will often hold him in my hand with my finger down his spine, in a way I imagine a baseball is held by a pitcher. I have not ever flung the weeping yogi although I have been tempted, but knowing how he fits into my hand helps me remember that I am but a speck in the universe.

I am not able to take on the hurt of the world, although I do, often try. I am not able to take on the devastation and pain of my community, although I do, often try. I hold the weeping yogi in this way and turn my focus only to how it feels in my hand.

The softness of the wood, the shape of the figure. The increasing frailty and pain in my hands. Then I concentrate on my breathing. I relax my body and I realise that even in the darkest, most horrifying times, there is hope.

Jeremiah, once he accepted God's gift, learned this. And I believe that contributed to his tears. His tears were those of frustration, of devastation and of hope.

Friday I gathered with the family and friends of Irene Endicott at the Sparwood Rec Centre for her Memorial Service. She was "old and filled with years" as we say. She had the most amazing family dinner on Sunday the 7th of August. She was dressed in pink, her favourite colour, with a matching pink hat.

Her great-grand-daughter paraded her, in her wheelchair on the porch at the Sparwood Seniors Centre and she waved that royal wave with both her hands, a broad smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye. A regal Queen on her wheeled throne, delighted that she was "in charge of this lot!"

The next day she began morphine as her liver and kidneys had stopped working. And she drew her last breath on Friday the 12th. I went to see her after she had died, and anointed her and prayed with her and her family.

I brought a prayer shawl with me that I had intended to take to her the following day. Instead, I draped it over her recently deceased body and asked God to infuse Irene with the prayers and blessing that filled that prayer shawl. I asked God to be with her family as they navigate life without their matriarch.

At the memorial service on Friday two of the newest great grandsons were strolling around, both toddlers. One was repeatedly given a bottle of which he would take a sip then chuck it to one side. The other wandered around waving and saying "HI" to everyone. Their innocence and joy were a much needed soothing balm for a gathering of broken-hearted people. Young Felix looked at the still from the video of Irene on her last best day and he exclaimed "NANNY!"

All of this to say, if you ever find yourself in a place where you believe God is calling you, remember to say yes. From personal experience, I can tell you the longer you drag your feet and make excuses, God will be waiting.

Whatever your ministry is – that of preaching or music or listening or parenthood or street sweeping or baking or the ministry of simply being, God has a use for you. God has a ministry for you. And I pray each of you learn what your ministry is and live it to its fullest.

You may not ever be as famous as Jeremiah, but know that for those whom your ministry touches, you will always be remembered. As long as your name is uttered, you will be remembered.

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Sermon for Pentecost 11 – 21 August 2022
Jeremiah 1.4-10