

But I am Only...

Jeremiah 1: 4-10

Rev. John Allen

Back when I was just starting out in ministry, I was an Associate Pastor on a large staff and I was getting ready to lead a workshop some Spring afternoon. I decided that it would be nice of me to not bother anyone and set up the tables and chairs myself, so that is exactly what I did.

I got about halfway through laying the room out when Geraldo, the Assistant Sexton came bursting through the door. "I can do that, you know..." He said.

"O I know Geraldo.... I just didn't want to bother you...Really, its no problem."

He put his hand on my shoulder, and only half kidding said: "You know you get to preach your sermons. This is how I serve God."

Just in case I made the mistake of thinking that I was the only one in that room with a vocation. In case I thought I was the only one who saw my work as a response to God's grace.

I've learned that lesson over and over.

I know a musician named David who speaks beautifully about his vocation. He knew it the first time he played the instrument that he would dedicate his life to mastering. "I was s a child, but the first time I pressed the keys, and heard that sound, I knew that I was meant to play." He says. "I knew that my spirit would only find its true expression through this instrument."

I know a teacher named Jenn who felt called by God, summoned to prisons and shelters to find mothers, and then out to find their children, called by God to build a school where they would have as good a chance as anyone else.

And then there is Sharon. She worked in the dining hall at my college. She would chat us up in the line, she learned our names faster than or professors. And I think more students sought her out after a bad breakup than ever went to the counseling center or the chaplains office. It seemed like she was in the stands for every game, of every team. And she wept through every graduation ceremony.

Now it just so happens that I entered Davidson in the same freshman class as Stephen Curry, basketball superstar and two-time MVP of the NBA. Stephen recently visited Davidson for a day, to receive the College's gratitude for a generous gift, and to speak to the student body. He named two people in that speech who had shaped his time at Davidson. His basketball coach. And Sharon, whose gift of hospitality and love, made a home for him.

This is all vocation. Callings. People who inhabit the world, and conduct their work, not just with a sense of its simple utility, but with some sense that through this work they can respond to God, to the Spirit at the heart of their lives, they can serve.

Now for some folks, vocation is not really part of their profession. That is ok too. Some people live out the heart of their purpose in the world in the way they gather neighbors for a meal, or in the way they parent, or volunteer, or tend to a little patch of land and make it more beautiful. It doesn't have to be your job.

But we all have a vocation. I believe that there is for each one of us, some call that we are inclined to respond to, in the way we live, or work, or move through the world.

Here is the problem.

Which you already know.

The world is terrifyingly violent, and feels perilous and unstable.

Our eyes are watching more violence than our hearts were ever designed to hold.

And we all feel helpless, like tiny corks in a thrashing ocean, where generations of violence and reprisal, and oppression and terror, seethe into heaps.

And the world needs a lot more than chairs set up, or sermons for that matter.

The world needs more than a school, more than beautiful music, more than a meal served with a smile.

And even the most courageous politician, or the bravest peacemaker, is not going to be able to calm the seas.

And even if we summoned every bit our might to try to force the world back into order, I think we've learned by now, that in our time the ripples of violence are usually more violence.

This isn't a movie. No one is going to swoop down and save the day.

In all likelihood this will get worse. And it will break our hearts. The terrifying truth is, there is very little any of us could do about it.

This is a very hard place for us to be. Powerless. I think it might be among the most uncomfortable feelings any of us could have, to see chaos and suffering and feel genuinely powerless against it.

Let me tell you something I believe: we all have a vocation. I believe that there is for each one of us, some call that we are inclined to respond to, in the way we live, or work, or move through the world.

It is so tempting to believe in superheroes. To believe that the course of human history can be set right in an instant by an uncommon act of singular heroism.

In reality though, I believe that history can only be set right by the quite common and unheroic devotion of each of us to our vocations.

Peace is not made by politicians while the rest of us cheer from the sidelines, it is built when we express genuine love for and solidarity with the neighbors we have.

Hope is not born as a proposition in the halls of power, it is kindled when we look to our own hearts to find what gifts and treasures God has placed there.

Love is not fabricated, packaged, and distributed. It is cultivated through a thousand small acts of trust, forgiveness, and grace.

I wish I knew a way to make it all ok in the blink of an eye. And I will pray fervently, and hope that you will too, for the kind of miracle that only comes from God.

But I want to call you off the ramparts of outrage, and into your vocation. To use the life, and the love, and the heart that God gave you to shape what you *can* reach, to heal where you *can* heal.

I believe that the path to durable peace runs through our vocations. I believe that God has placed into the sum of human hearts all that we need to build the world we long for. What we need to do is to each live out our part, and allow all others to do the same.

Which brings me at last back to Jeremiah. And God's call.

What is most noteworthy to me about Jeremiah's call is that it has very little to do with who he is, and what he is capable of, and it has everything to do with what God is seeking to do through his life.

The call is rooted in relationship with God. God says: "I have known you, longer than you have known yourself. And I have chosen you for something."

And Jeremiah replies: "But I am only a boy and I do not know how to speak."

God says: "Do not say, I am only a boy, you will go where I send you and speak to who I command."

But God doesn't leave it at a simple command. God says: "And you don't need to be afraid, because I will be with you."

"Do not be afraid. I am with you."

So the call begins and ends with Jeremiah's relationship with God. I made you. I know you. I am with you. And the good news for us, as God's people, is that that is God's promise to each of us too. God has a calling for you.

Do not say "I am only." Says our God.

I made you. I know you. I am with you.

You are a child of God. And God has called you into a life that will touch the world with love, with peace, with joy, with hope, with beauty. Everyone of you. You have a part to play in the world that God is striving to create.

And there are no small parts in responding to God's call. There are no insignificant disciples.

Because in the end, it is not about who we are, it about how God is at work through our lives.

You might be tempted to think: "But I am only...."

Do not say "I am only."

I made you. I know you. I am with you.