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Do Not Say I am Only..." Luke 4:21-30

Let us pray: O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.

We are skillful at the art of making excuses, aren't we? "I don't know how." "I didn't understand." "I couldn't find the right tools." I don't have time today maybe tomorrow.

In the Christian world, we can find all sorts of excuses not to obey God's voice: "It's the preacher's job." "It's not my gift." "I've already served, let someone else do it." "I'm too busy or too tired or too old or too young."

It has been said, "Excuses are tools of the incompetent, and those who specialize in them seldom go far." Ben Franklin wrote, "He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else."

Jeremiah had every excuse ready when God called him to be a prophet. His excuses are often our excuses for not heeding God's voice when he calls. Countering each excuse was a promise from God.

We often think of prophets as people who can tell the future. But a prophet spoke messages to the present that had future ramifications. They were forth tellers more than they were foretellers, exposing the people's sins and calling them back to their covenant responsibilities before God.

Being a prophet was more demanding than serving as a priest. The priests' duties were predictable. Everything was written down in the law. The prophet never knew from one day to the next what the Lord would call him to say or to do.

The priest worked primarily to preserve the past. The prophet labored to change the present so the nation would have a future. Priests dealt with externals - rituals, sacrifices, offerings, services - whereas the prophet tried to reach and change hearts.

Priests ministered primarily to individuals with various needs. Prophets, on the other hand, addressed whole nations, and usually the people they addressed didn't want to hear the message.

Priests were supported from the sacrifices and offerings of the people, but prophets had no guaranteed income. Jesus, too, was called to be a prophet.

He traveled from place to place challenging the people to change so that their future in heaven would be guaranteed. Jesus spoke to the hearts of people. Most did not accept his message of repentance, for they did not want to change.

God knew Jeremiah, chose Jeremiah, and appointed Jeremiah. He was known by name, hand-picked by God, and commissioned to serve. Those acts give one a great sense of purpose.

The promise of God's purpose allows us to let go of our own plans and to receive God's plan without fear. Like Jeremiah and Jesus, we need to accept that our future is not our own. We are God's. He has a distinct plan and purpose for our lives.

But I protested, 'Oh no, Lord, GOD! Look, I don't know how to speak since I am only a youth'" (Jer. 1:6). Jeremiah felt inadequate as a public speaker. By the way, this excuse was shared by Moses (Ex. 4:10).

When I went to my 50th year class reunion, some of my former classmates wanted to know what I was doing. I told them I was called to be a pastor. They thought they didn't hear me correctly. They actually thought I was joking.

"Surely, you don't mean madlady Hunt is called to preach. You must mean your sister Janie. Janie was the quiet one. Miss goody two shoes." I was always the loud one who made everyone laugh with me instead of at me. Surely God could not have picked Madelynne to be a preacher.

When God's call came, I felt honored but I why me? I felt a lot like, Calvin Miller, pastor and author. He wrote about his call: He said,

"I was so inferior, even the neighbors noted it and pointed it out to my mother as I grew up. In my late teens, one of my sisters felt led of God to help me get in touch with myself by telling me that in her opinion, that if God called me to do anything, he must have had a wrong number.

When I told my preacher I was called to preach, he didn't necessarily feel that God had a wrong number, but he was concerned that I might have had a poor connection."

God has a way to overcome your doubts and fears, doesn't he? I have learned over the years, however, that the person most aware of your inadequacy is usually the person most dependent on God's all-sufficiency.

Through the years I have learned to rely upon God. His strength is made perfect in my weakness. His glory is manifested through my flaws. Our talent may appear inadequate, but God always equips those he calls. We have the promise of God's provision.

"Then the LORD reached out His hand, touched my mouth, and told me: I have now filled your mouth with My words" (Jer. 1:9). The touch was not so much to purify as it was to inspire and empower. It was symbolic of the gift of prophecy bestowed on Jeremiah.

Jesus experienced this touch in a visible, yet profound way. Following his baptism, immediately coming out of the water, the heavens opened, and the Spirit of God descended on him like a dove. And God spoke, "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him" (Matt. 3:17).

God blesses not the silver-tongued orator, but the one whose tongue has been touched with coals from the altar. God uses not the most gifted and talented person, but the one touched by the hand of God.

God uses the most unlikely persons to shake a church or a community or a nation. Never underestimate the power of the touch; especially when God does the touching. Even Jesus had a hard time convincing his own home town people that God had anointed him to preach the gospel not just to the Jews, but to those on the outside.

God's call may come at an inopportune time, but he never sends forth his servant alone. We have the promise of God's presence. "Then the LORD said to me: Do not say, 'I am only a youth,' for you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you. Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to deliver you. This is the LORD's declaration" (Jer. 1:7-8).

Before Jeremiah could experience God's presence, he had to go where God sent him, speak what God told him, and reject fear. Someone once said that when God calls us to a task, he does not give us a road map to follow and then leave us to our resources.

God walks with us. His presence gives us the strength to stand in the face of every assault. Jesus felt that same Presence. He and the Father were one. He could go on because God walked with him.

What a difference it makes knowing that when we are being sent, someone is going with us. We know we do not have to walk the lonesome road alone, that we have a traveling companion.

Jesus' teaching contained mercy and judgment, grace and punishment. Jesus' teachings were dangerous, too. In fact, it was his teaching that cost him his life. What God says through us may be dangerous, but God gives us the strength to endure. We have the promise of God's prevailing.

"Today, I am the One who has made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land - against the kings of Judah, its

officials, its priests, and the population. They will fight against you but never prevail over you, since I am with you to rescue you" (Jer. 1:18-19).

Notice the architectural terms: a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls. They are solid and unshakeable like the God who conceived them, and the prophet whom they would come to characterize. God reassured Jeremiah: Attack you they will; overcome you they can't.

The person who stands with God will prevail. Someone once said: "One with God is a majority." Alone we are helpless. With God we prevail. Jesus obeyed. Whatever you think of Jesus, remember this, his heart was a willing and obedient heart.

He always did what his Father directed. There was no hesitation, no questioning, no circumventing. Only immediate action. Has God called you? Then he will fulfill his purpose in you, he will equip you, he will enable you, he will protect you, he will accompany you.

Are you obeying his commands? Then he is with you to protect you. Are you sharing the word? Then he will accomplish his purposes no matter how the people respond.

1 Peter 4:10-11 says, each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides.

But the LORD said to me, do not say, I am too young. You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the LORD.

God reassured Jeremiah by telling him that His presence would be with him at all times. We have the same promise. Our God is like a king that accompanies his soldiers to the frontlines of the battle.

He told Paul in Corinth, do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city. If we are faithful to God, we can be sure that He will be faithful to us. He will be with us always with all authority.

Today, let's learn from Jeremiah. God sees each of us as extremely special. He created you for a good purpose, to do good work. He loves you. When He calls you, do not say, I not say, "I am only...." Amen.

Let us pray: May you be open to the call of the Holy One – May you bear the pain you are called upon to bear for this world, may you know when it is right to pluck up and pull down. May you have wisdom to see what must be destroyed and overthrown; may you have courage and stamina to build and plant when the season is ripe. Amen.