

First Presbyterian Church
Bozeman, Montana
Dan Krebill, co-pastor

May 6, 2018
6th Sunday of Easter
Jeremiah 1:4-8; 1 John 3:1-3

Called as Children of God

Well, here we are, May 6. The grass is getting green—finally. I’ve even seen and heard a few lawnmowers operating around town. The sunshine now has a lot of warmth to it and the trees and other plants are responding to it. And yesterday was graduation at MSU marking the end of the academic year. (By the way, we’re heading to the graduation ceremonies of that other university this coming weekend.) More end-of-school-year and end-of-program-year activities are in the works and before we know it, it’ll be Memorial Day weekend and the summer will be underway full bore.

Here at our church, we’re also moving toward a seasonal shift. Next Sunday, members of our Rockhaven operational board and staff will be leading our worship services in what we’re calling “Camp Sunday.” It’s sure to be a preview of things to come as our wonderful Rockhaven Camp program continues to gear up and launch another wonderful summer of fostering a clear connection between our wonderful loving God and the children, youth and adults who will be reveling in God’s creation at the base of Sheep Rock along the Gallatin River.

May also marks the approach of the conclusion of our Year of Call that we’ve been observing and celebrating since September 10th. Two weeks from today is Pentecost Sunday. It’s a fitting day that we’ve chosen for the culmination and conclusion to this year-long emphasis. We’ll be hearing a lot more about Pentecost on the day itself. But let me just say a few words about it today, so as to pique your interest and hopefully your resolve to be here that day.

The two big days of the year for Christians are Christmas and Easter. Even those who are marginally affiliated or not even formally affiliated with the church would likely get this answer correctly on a trivia test. Christmas and Easter are rightly and fittingly the big two—Christmas, when Jesus was born; and Easter when Jesus was raised from the dead after having been put to death. Christmas is about God becoming flesh. And Easter is about God’s conquering sin and death in our world.

There’s a third day though that is arguably as important as these first two. Because it is the day that marked the beginning of just how the good news of the other two big days was to be broadcast and shared with the world. It is on Pentecost that the followers of Jesus—that is, the followers of the resurrected Jesus—were empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel—the good news—to every corner of the earth. It could be argued that without Pentecost, we who are gathered here today, might not have ever heard about Christmas or Easter or even Jesus himself. So Pentecost is a big deal and that’s why we make it a big deal in worship. So, I hope you will find your way to worship on Pentecost Sunday. And if it’s here that you’ll be, make sure to wear something red to symbolize the coming of the Holy Spirit who was said to have arrived as tongues of flame.

So with camp Sunday next week, and Pentecost the following week, today is the last of what we might call our regular Year of Call Sundays when we will take up one last story of call that we glean from the Bible. As we’ve been saying throughout the year, there is a wealth of such stories and events in the Bible—so much so that we could probably do another whole year of this series without repeating any that we’ve covered this year.

The call of Jeremiah that we just read about is yet another such call story. Jeremiah is one of the great prophets of the Hebrew Bible. He ranks right up there with the other big names like Isaiah and Moses. And like the accounts of the call from God to them, when Jeremiah first becomes aware of God calling, he is very quick to offer an objection as to why God has likely made a mistake in selecting

Jeremiah for a special task. It seems that often those whom God calls to special tasks and ministries just don't see it coming before their encounter with God.

Jeremiah's initial response to God is to say, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." (Jer. 1:6) Now we don't know exactly how old Jeremiah was at this point. Maybe he was a child of single-digit years. Maybe he was a young adolescent. Or maybe he was an adult who was feeling like no more than a young child as far as being adequately equipped to do what he thought God had in mind for him. In any case, Jeremiah's reaction was like that of many of the others that God had called previously. "I'm not the right person for the task, God. There must be someone else who is better equipped."

Jeremiah's negative or skeptical reaction comes though as if he didn't even hear the first part of the word of the Lord that came to him. That word is, "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." (Jer. 1:5)

If ever there was an example of divine providence or divine destiny, this would be it. God's reference to Jeremiah's prenatal period in which God consecrated and appointed is clear indication that Jeremiah's education or training or experience (you know, those categories of accomplishment that we put on a resume or cover letter for a job), or lack thereof, have absolutely nothing to do with God's calling Jeremiah to be a prophet.

And Jeremiah's contention that he doesn't know how to speak, is also met with the response from God that it is God who will tell Jeremiah what it is he to say and how to say it. There is no prerequisite course in public speaking or creative writing required.

In each of the call stories that we've considered this year, God is at work in the world and in the lives of people who God calls to serve. In each of these cases the jobs and tasks to which various people are called are not jobs and tasks that had a job posting, application requirements, an application deadline, and a process by which all those pieces lead to an interview and then a job offer that is either attractive and enticing or not. As important as it is for us in our world today to pay attention to all of those factors that are part of a vocational or professional career trajectory, it is simply not the case when the call of God is at hand.

The call of Jeremiah before he was even born, in the words of professor Bruce C. Birch, "is less a statement of divine determinism than a decisive witness that a call to God's service is not a carefully considered career choice. . . . and [it] precedes any of our careful decision-making processes, often in times and ways that do not fully make sense in human terms." (*Feasting on the Word: preaching the revised common lectionary, Year C, Vol. 3/* David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, gen. eds., © 2010 Westminster John Knox Press, p. 367)

This is where then that the call of Jeremiah is a fitting way to begin to draw to a conclusion our Year of Call. And that's where Jeremiah's age comes to the fore—Jeremiah's very young age more specifically. That Jeremiah, again, one of the great prophets of the Hebrew Bible, is called before he has any demonstrated training or aptitude underscores the equipping that God provides to those who are called by God. Methodist pastor Thomas R. Steagald sums it up this way. "God equips the called, in other words; God does not call the equipped." (*ibid.* P. 368)

God equips the called.

God's call of the young Jeremiah is a reminder that our being called, and our being equipped for that call, whatever that may be and at whatever age or stage of life, is perhaps more easily embraced when we remember that all of us within the family of faith are children of God.

We read in that little book of 1 John tucked away in the back of the New Testament, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." (1 Jn. 3:1) It is difficult to overstate the depth of God's love for us as revealed in this verse. God's love for us is so deep and profound that God has chosen to adopt us as children of God.

The legal adoption of children in our culture today is a big deal. It is something not entered into lightly. Rather, it is something that takes determination, effort and love. When a legal adoption is completed and finalized, the relationship between the adopted child and the parent or parents who pursued the adoption is as deep and profound as love can be between any parent and child regardless of genetics and biology.

The love that is being described in 1 John is exactly this depth of love that is at the heart of all legal and healthy adoptions. God has done all that it takes to consummate our adoption as God's children.

As children of God then let us not be so quick and eager to grow beyond the parent-child relationship. Let us not be so quick to liberate ourselves from that parent-child relationship.

Rather, let us embrace it fully, recognizing that God does know us and has known us before we were even formed in the womb.

Embraced in God's love, God equips us for that which we are called to do.

Perhaps springtime, when change is in the air, when changes and transitions are all around us, is just the time to re-tune our "perceptors" to be as open and accepting of that which we may discover is in our future that is in God's future as well.

Let us pray. Loving God, who has adopted us as your very own children, we thank you for Jeremiah and his story. We thank you that by remembering how it is that you called him to be your servant, your prophet, we are reminded that it is you who equips when you call. Help us, O God, to be open to your calling and your equipping so that we may be the children you intend us to be. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.