

Jeremiah 1:1-10  
You Are Called to Build  
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You are called to build. Interesting that on this Sunday when we will be sitting with and learning from Gianfranco about how best to plan for and raise funds for a building project, that the Old Testament Passage assigned to this week is Jeremiah 1, you'll see what I mean in a moment.

Jesus Christ is a builder. Jesus said to Peter, Petros (Rocky) on you I will build my church. The Apostle Paul saw himself as a builder, he describes his influence as that of a skilled master builder. The New Testament says that each of us must please our neighbors for the good purpose of building up the neighbor (Romans 15:2). We are all builders. This morning what I would like to invite us to consider this question: what is it that God in Jesus is building? And how can we join?

If indeed, as it says in Romans 15, that our lives are tied up in this cosmic construction project, what does it mean to be a part of that? Well our teacher for this morning will be a young man, probably not more than 17 or 18 years old who lived in a little town called Anathoth about 3 miles northeast of Jerusalem (anyone here from Anathoth?), his name is Jeremiah. Jeremiah was called to build. So let's begin today by reading of this call.

I invite you to join me out of reverence and respect for the reading of God's holy word, and when I'm done reading I'll say this is the word of the Lord so that if you believe it to be true you can respond by saying "thanks be to God."

**The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, <sup>2</sup>to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. <sup>3</sup>It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. <sup>4</sup>Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "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." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." <sup>7</sup>But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."**

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. The Lord is saying to Jeremiah that I have a plan for you to build your life, and I have had this plan for you before you knew me, even before you were born. I think this is interesting. Jeremiah says that I am only a boy, it's the same word that Joseph used to say he was only a boy and Joseph was 17, so maybe Jeremiah was the same age. I like to think of Jeremiah as being a college freshman.

The data shows that most people have a settled religious affiliation by the age of 25. That season is such an important one in a person's life. Certainly a person can have an encounter with God at anytime, but far fewer of us do so older in life.

If Jeremiah were alive today he would be a part of the largest demographic and population in American history, sociologists call it Generation Z, those that were born between 1995 and 2010. It's the largest population alive today, it's the largest in history—larger in fact than the Baby Boom Generation—it's our present, it's our future. It also happens to be the most unchurched generation ever. And Jeremiah would also belong to the fastest growing religious affiliation ever, the "nones." These are those that are religiously unaffiliated.

Now in 1940 1 in 40 Americans were nones, in 2005 1 out of 5, and in 2015 1 out of every 3 would check that box "none." This is not hostility to God or toward religion, it's more indifference, meh, yawn, swipe left.

But not here, not Jeremiah. Here we have a real 18 year old having an authentic religious experience. And I wonder, how is this happening? How does this work, because so much of our efforts as those who want to share hope in Jesus, who want to teach the faith, and help shape generations as followers of Jesus, have been so woefully ineffective in the last few decades. Here we get a clue from Jeremiah how this happens. Jeremiah says that the word of the Lord came to me, in the womb I formed you, before you were born I knew you. This is an act of spiritual construction, God is building a soul, God is building a life in this young man?

How? In typical Hebrew narrative the details are spare or compressed. We might think that there was a divine moment where a glow surrounded him and he heard the audible voice of God. But I doubt that is what was like for Jeremiah. How did this Word come to Jeremiah? Perhaps someone said something to him. His dad was a priest, maybe it was a family member an aunt or a grandmother. Maybe it came to him as he observed the passing of stars overhead and pondered the expanse of the galaxy with their primitive models. Maybe he came in contact with the depth of human frailty and it caused him to wonder, "is there more? There has to be more! More to the world than what we can see or perceive."

We do get the sense that there is something that comes to him, something from outside him, a transcendent presence, a word, the Greeks would call this the LOGOS. Almost like a solution that draws us toward a fixed point, a meaning, or purpose. What we will soon learn is that Jeremiah has a deep longing and passion for justice, and can see that things are not working the way God speaks of his creation, and Jeremiah has this passion aroused within him awakening him

At age 18 Jeremiah is awakened to the calling that God has placed on his life, and Jeremiah says "yes" to that calling.

But "yes" to what? You shall go to all whom I send you, you shall speak to all those whom you have called me to speak. This is somewhat of a common story, God awakens faith and zeal in a person and calls them to action. He did it in Jeremiah, he did it in Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, he did it in William Wilberforce, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr, Mandela, Tutu, Sojourner Truth. He does it in women and me who he has appointed at a particular place and time to speak, to in some places to tear down, and in other places to build something new.

He did it in the life of Denis Estimon. Dennis was a Haitian immigrant who a few years ago was a student at Florida's Boca Raton high school. As a new student many years before he remembered all too well the loneliness and alienation he felt as an immigrant in a new place. Now as a high school Junior, and one who was well acclimated, accepted, and even popular, Dennis felt that his experience was calling him to move among his classmates. Watch this with me.

Video *We Dine Together!*

Something even more amazing will be done in Jeremiah's life, because he hears this call from God to be a part of something new, a new missionary building project—not building a place, but building people. Jeremiah was being called to help build all the nations of the world.

You know I think Jeremiah's life, or the context in which he finds himself is not so different from our own. The 400 year monarchy that started with Saul and David and continued through Solomon and a long line of mostly sordid leaders has come to an end. There is social and political turmoil, social injustice, ethical disregard, religious indifference—it's a hard season in Israel's life and Jeremiah gets sent to them. It's why sometimes Jeremiah is called the Prophet of Doom. Jeremiah will speak hard things that people need to hear, but he will also speak the truths and promises that had eluded the people's hearing for so long and speak of the inexplicable beauty of the world that God would continue to make and remake in the lives of his people.

Wabash Pres had something of a reign of the glory days, a lot of the mainline churches in Wabash did. But like most over many years the steady decline has made our churches feel like something like communities of exiles, or the remnants of a former age. Whether that was a better age or just a different age, is a matter of vigorous discussion over coffee after worship. I've got my opinions, and I'm sure you do as well.

But we are facing a moment in the life of our community and in the life of our nation where the question is being posed to us: whose voice will ultimately guide our lives. Whose voice gets first chair in our hearts, and to whose voice will we ultimately bend the knee and offer our allegiance

And to this call that God offers to Jeremiah, he says "yes." Because the only way to know or see the outcomes of who I am and who God is calling me to be is to say yes to the one who knew me before I was born.

God says that Jeremiah will ultimately be a builder, **"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."**

Jeremiah has been given great power in this moment, but it will not be the power of the sword, or the power of the plow, or even the power of his own might, it will be from the power of his words. JFK said once of Churchill that Winston Churchill mobilized the English language and sent it into battle. Proverbs 18:21 tell us that death and life are in the power of the tongue.

I appoint you to build. God will build his people. Later in Jeremiah 24 God will say this to the people through Jeremiah:

**I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. <sup>7</sup>I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.**

God is still building, even in our day. God has come among us in the person of Jesus Christ through his holy Spirit and the words of the apostles to speak against the power of sin and death, of injustice and persecution among his people, to create a new world in the midst of the old.

See today, I appoint you. I want to suggest that God is not only speaking to Jeremiah, but he is also speaking to you. God is appointing you in the prophetic tradition to be and do and speak the words of the Kingdom that is revealed in Scripture. 1 Corinthians 14 tells us what the community that embodies these qualities will look like

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

We as a community have this same calling that Jeremiah did, to build.