Sermon

2-3-13

First Christian Church

Paris, Kentucky

Title:

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Think for a minute about interviewing for a job. Most people will have developed an interest in the field in which they desire to work. That interest may have developed as a young child or at least during the educational process. A person may have worked at a job in the field or have done an internship with those who share the same vision for work in the world.

Preparing to search for the job, a person takes stock of their interests and also the qualities which make them an attractive candidate for the job. Some businesses require a resume and one must be prepared with no mistakes in spelling and relatively brief. They say these days, that a resume must be one page and no more. Those longer than one page, will be thrown away by the person in human resources, unless there is a compelling reason for it to be longer.

The phone call comes requesting an interview. The candidate dresses appropriately, rehearses, creates a few good questions about the place and reviews their own unique qualifications to highlight in the interview. They allow extra time to reach their interview in order to be on time. They know the initial greeting is important and not to share too much personal information.

They wait to be contacted after the interview, either for a followup interview or to be notified that they have not been hired.

There is a distinct difference in the process when God seeks us to work in the kingdom for the people of God. God issues a demand. Often the one who is given the opportunity does not want it and comes up with what they think is a great and valid excuse and they hope that ends the calling.

Who knows whether God has issued many calls to serve and been turned down. You would suspect that might be the case. Jesus was turned down by the rich young ruler. When he read the scripture in the temple and presented demands to the people, many went away sad. There were very few followers at the cross. The followers who were still with him could fit into a small room where the door was locked.

Jesus asked his disciples to stay awake with him in the garden where he went to pray. They all fell asleep. It's hard to get good disciples these days.

Now, we back up hundreds of years from Jesus day and time, to the calling of Jeremiah to be a prophet for the living God. Jeremiah does not pursue God in this matter, God selects and pursues Jeremiah. God begins with a powerful argument. Here is how Jeremiah heard this calling.

*Now the world 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."*

This not an interview, nor is a traditional job being offered. A person cannot be paid adequately to do this work. God will provide, but you never hear one who God calls asking about the salary, do we? Rather, we hear a lot about what it is going to cost in time, energy, effort, a shifting social status, interruption of a career, unpopularity and more.

God identifies in Jeremiah a person who meets the qualifications of a prophet and will be given the skills needed to accomplish the tasks at hand. When I was trained in hiring sales people, I was told to hire people who had never been automobile salespeople before. That way they can be trained to follow your system. We didn't always follow that rule, but there was something to that. It was difficult, if not impossible, to retrain someone who believed they already knew everything there was to know about selling and taking care of the customer.

Jeremiah seems not to know that he had been identified as a prophet before he was born. This is a testimony to how the Lord works. God is at work within us to accomplish far more than we ask or imagine, before we know he is at work in us. For me, there is something comforting about this. I have untapped potential to rise up and do something good for God, something even great for God, especially when I do not think I have much to offer.

God has been turned down by some of the greatest.

Abraham and Sarah said they were too old to be the genesis of a whole new culture of people. Moses, who led the people from slavery in Egypt through the desert into the Promised Land, said he could not speak, in addition to the fact that he had killed a man. Isaiah was a sinner and needed to be purified before he could serve. David was a charismatic leader, but needed correcting during his tenure as king. Mary, the mother of Jesus was perplexed or terrified when the angel came to her. Joseph did not understand Mary's pregnancy until visited by an angel in a dream. Saul needed a dramatic conversion experience before he became Paul and began visiting and establishing new churches.

Peter did not quite get what he needed to do to become all God wanted him to be. Elijah hid in a cave before he met God and understood fully what God wanted. Jeremiah's excuse for not serving God was that he was too young and didn't know what to say. God solved that one quickly saying, *"Do not say, I am only a boy: for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you."*

But it is back at the beginning of this text that we need to go. God begins:

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.*

God designed the very idea of a Jeremiah in the world to be a person who

would follow him. Jeremiah's spiritual DNA was predetermined. Jeremiah

belonged to God. Even the very idea of Jeremiah belonged to God. Keep in

mind that God knew Jeremiah before he had even been conceived. This is a

remarkable occurrence. Think about this until you just can't get your mind

around this thought. God knew you. God knew you before you were

a physical being, before you could respond, before you could breathe.

God loved you, infused you with purpose, gave you a reason to live and

work on the earth. And to think there are times when we wake up and

wonder why we are here, what good are we and wonder what we are supposed

to be doing today, tomorrow, next month, next year.

Few of us contemplate God's claim on our lives. After all, aren't we just trying to

get by, have a better month than last year, keep our heads above water? God has

more in store for you than that. Just going by what God says to Jeremiah is

enough for me. If we will pay attention, we are being led forward every day,

to do this work God has wired us to do. But we shrink from it and we are in

good company. Jeremiah, Abraham, Moses, Saul, we are in good company.

Then God says,

*...and before you were born I consecrated you.*

Each one of us are born children of the living God, created in his image,

empowered and instructed to love and to serve. Somewhere along the

way we have missed the consecrated part. You are holy, blessed, gifted,

loved, protected by the shepherd, forgiven, cleansed, freed, empowered,

full of the Spirit, unique, capable, talented. All you need to discover is that

you are called to serve the God of your earliest dreams, the God who saw

you coming, the God who knew there was somebody coming through whom

he could work to bring good news to the world.

This means that you are meant to step up and meet head on the challenges that are brought before you. You are wired to deal with disappointment, equipped to use your gifts to make your way in the world, given gifts of courage, strength of will, filled with the power of love to accomplish the difficult task of raising children the way they were meant to be raised, fortified to reconcile with a relative or friend, able to see the truth of the matter before you and act accordingly.

Even Jesus empowers us to walk away from situations that we just have no power to change and contain destructive patterns and harmful messages to us and those we love.

This is all because God placed his thumbprint on us before we were even a twinkle in our mother and father's eyes.

This is powerful. It is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.