



Nine to Five

TEXT
Jeremiah 1:4–10

May 17, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

These verses tell us of Jeremiah’s call story. Jeremiah is called to be a prophet, which is never a job people want. Last week, we saw the disciples drop their nets at the drop of a hat when Jesus said, “Come and follow me.” I said that all of us share a basic calling. The calling that we all share is to be Christian; to greet each decision, each relationship, each moment from a point of faith. We are not called to relegate our spirituality to a siloed sanctuary, but faith shapes every moment of our lives. We all share that calling.

But Jeremiah is called to do a specific job. Does God still do that? Does God call us to our jobs? Or particular tasks? If you are working in IT or banking or in a classroom or managing people, is that because God wants you to do that job? Maybe. Our tradition teaches that any work — any work that is done with care and contributes to the community — is holy work. But calling is a complex thing.

When I was in high school, I wanted to be a musician. I wanted to be Will Breyspraak. I wanted to direct a church

choir. I went to college on a music scholarship, seeking a music major. Music was my passion. At the end of my freshman year, my dad said, “Son, I know you love music and that’s great, but you have a habit that seems to be important to you that I think makes a vocation in music impossible.”

“I have a habit?”

He said, “You like to eat. You are not good enough as a musician to both do music and eat. So, choose what you think you prefer.” He was right — though that was not something I told him at the time.

When I have heard people say, “I have found my calling,” what they are often saying is I have found something that brings me to life; I found my passion. That’s a good thing. Frederick Buechner understands calling that way. He says our call is the place where “your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”¹ Sometimes, but it’s not the definition that Jeremiah would give. He didn’t have a lot of deep gladness in his calling. No, our calling isn’t always about our bliss; it’s more our job. It is not always about what the world gives to us; it is what the world needs from us.

So, how do we know what the world needs from us? If God calls us to something, God also gives us gifts to do the work. It’s about gifts. Even a casual look at human beings reveals that God gives gifts to different people for different things ... not just skills, but capacities. I think God calls auto mechanics and IT professionals; God calls grocery store clerks and school teachers and business managers. Any work that is done with care and contributes to the community is holy work.

But the calling is not just to the task, but to how we engage the task.

If I understand the text, the call of God will always be to do what we do in a way that is good for others. To live in a way that makes a difference in other’s lives. The Christian lives and works in a way to make the community better. Jeremiah recognized his call was his responsibility to his community.

Jeremiah didn’t want this work. At one point, he complains to God: “I have become a laughing stock. ... Even my close friends are watching for me to stumble. So I say to myself, I won’t do God’s work

anymore, but then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones, I am weary of holding it in and I cannot.”²

Sometimes our calling is something we just cannot turn away from. We just can’t help ourselves.

In September of 2018, a sophomore in high school with Asperger’s syndrome skipped school. She sat next to a sign that read, “School Strike for Climate.” Within a year she addressed heads of state at the U.N., met with the Pope, challenged Presidents, inspired four million people to join the global climate strike in September 2019, and would be named *Time* magazine’s Person of the Year for 2019.³ Like a Swedish Rosa Parks, she refused to accept business as usual. I have no idea if Greta Thunberg is a person of faith, but she knows she’s called. It’s like a fire shut up in her bones, and she wants her community to be better.

You know what that’s like. You respond to calls like that every day. *Time* magazine might not write about you, but you are doing what God calls you to do, so some of you make sure we find enough money to put solar panels on the buildings at the Meneilly Center. That’s because you are called. And there are folks in Ivanhoe, many of them students, who know Village Church because some of you can’t help but serve there. And they know you in Kenya and in the DR, in Haiti and at the US border —

because for some of you, caring for these people is like a fire shut up in your bones.

And the hungry in this community know that Village is a place that will respond, and youth in this community know that Village is a place that will welcome them and love them. Young adults know that there is ministry here for them — not because we need them to make the church stronger in some fashion, but simply because they are loved by God.

I could go on. You know what it is that happens in your life that you must do. It might mean being the best grandparent you know how to be. Or the best teacher you know how to be. Or maybe it’s a season to pay attention to your marriage. Or maybe it’s making phone calls to neighbors who can’t get outside.

It doesn’t have to be big, but God is calling us all the time. Is it your passion? Sometimes.

Is it your responsibility? Always.

Is it a particular job? It can be, as call always shows up in specifics. For any work that is done with care and is good for others is holy work. And sometimes it is work you can’t help but do. It is like a fire shut up in your bones. It must come out; you just can’t turn away from it. That’s a call for you.

¹Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (1973), p. 95

²Jeremiah 20:7–10

³*Time*, Dec. 23/30, 2019, pp. 50–54

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.