

**Devotions – September 19-25, 2021**

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**Responding to God's Call**

**Sunday, September 19, 2021**

Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10

*The Word of the Lord came to me saying. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. "Ah Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak, I am only a child." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say 'I am only a child.' 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. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*

In this series of scripture readings, we'll examine God's calls to both prophets and individuals. In most of these cases, as with Jeremiah, we'll find the specific elements of the call, the objection, the reassurance, and a sign of God's support.

We note that Jeremiah's calling actually involves him in the political affairs of his day. In fact God literally sets him over/against "nations and kingdoms to pluck up and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." As the book of Jeremiah makes clear, Yahweh is the God of the whole world – not just the God of Judah. And in Jeremiah's Judah, there is no separation of church and state. The language of Jeremiah's call is so powerful. Jeremiah was clearly identified and set apart to be a prophet to the nations. And despite his familiar protestations, God reassures him to not be afraid, for "I am with you and will rescue you..." The Lord then provides a sign when he "reached out his hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth saying, 'thus I have put my words in your mouth.'"

We pray: *As we consider your call, O Lord, to seek justice, serve one another, bring hope to all, and share your love and peace, may we rest in the assurance that you are always with us. And as Covid-19 continues to be a real threat throughout the world, we pray for all our health care workers as they continue to tirelessly serve all those in need. Amen*



**Monday, September 20, 2021**

Text: Exodus 3:10-14

***“So now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what will I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. That is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”***

In the verses prior to our reading, Moses has been tending his father-in-law’s sheep near Horeb, the mountain of God. He sees the bush burning but not being consumed and comes near to it. God calls his name, “Moses, Moses.” And Moses answers, “Here I am.” God instructs Moses to not come nearer as he is standing on holy ground. He then identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Moses is fearful and hides his face. God then explains his purpose for Moses’ call –to return to Egypt and bring the Israelites out of their slavery and suffering.

In this passage we observe the call, the objection or protest, God’s reassurance, and the sign, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” In addition, this passage is extraordinarily significant because for the first time, God states his name. “I AM WHO I AM, this is what you are to say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you.”

We pray: *Most Gracious and loving God, enable us to recognize you in all of your manifestations, to discern and do your will, and strengthen our resolve to seek and live out your truth and justice. Console us Lord, so that even when we stumble in the darkness and feel unsure, that we may perceive your light and serve as messengers of love and hope to all in need. Amen*



**Tuesday, September 21, 2021**

Text: Judges 6:12-17 & 22,23

***When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you mighty warrior.” “But sir,” Gideon replied, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.”***

***The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” “But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all of the Midianites together.”***

***Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.”...following the sign and Gideon’s realization that it really was the angel of the Lord, Gideon exclaimed, “Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!” But the Lord said to him, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.” So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord is Peace.***

In this passage from Judges, we find that the Israelites have again abandoned the Lord for false gods and find themselves being persecuted by the Midians (for 7 years). Again, God hears their cries and sends them a prophet, Gideon. As with Moses, Gideon is simply minding his own business and actually threshing wheat (in a winepress) to accomplish this task in a more secure place, when the angel of the Lord appears to him. We see the typical call, Gideon’s protestation (“My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family”), God’s reassurance (“Am I not sending you?”), God’s sign (requested by Gideon, “If now I have found favor your eyes...”), and God’s further reassurance (“Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.”). And just like every good prophet, Gideon built an altar to the Lord and set about his work destroying the altars of the false gods, specifically Baal. His work was two-fold: religious reform, starting with his own family, and such that the Israelites did not return to the false gods, and military action to counteract the yearly migration each spring of vast numbers of nomadic herdsman from the Aramean desert into the settled areas of Palestine.

Most significantly, with Gideon’s call and story, we have another powerful example of God’s love for his people and concern for their welfare. Each of these “calls” reflects the miraculous way in which God chooses an unlikely individual to be his messenger and rescue his people. And in that process, we witness the patience of God with his reluctant messenger and God’s loving reassurance as each one accepts his call.

We pray: *God of challenges, patience and reassurance, you guide us through the letting go’s and the new beginnings in our lives. May we be ever mindful of your love and patience with us. As we continue to seek justice for all, may we recognize you in all people. Especially in these many months of the pandemic, may we always remember the loss of so many, their families and friends and celebrate their lives well-lived. Amen*



**Wednesday, September 22, 2021**

Text: I Samuel 3:1, 6-10, 19-21

***The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions...***

***Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down and if he calls you say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."***

***The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. And Samuel's word came to all Israel.***

In this familiar passage, Samuel, who ministered before the Lord under Eli, receives God's call. Although the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to Samuel, he faithfully responded to what he perceived as Eli's repeated calls. Samuel was the prophet God chose to enact religious reform (Eli's family's sins) and establish Kingship in Israel. Samuel not only anointed both Saul and David, he also gave definition to the new order of God's rule over Israel that incorporated kingship into the structure. Given that Samuel's birth was the fervent desire of his mother, Hannah, after so many years of waiting, her vow to dedicate him to the Lord is similar to the intentional call of Jeremiah (*Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart*).

In terms of the four aspects of the call, there does not seem to be an objection or protestation on Samuel's part. He was dedicated to the Lord's service with Eli as his teacher and mentor and clearly accepted and embraced his call. Throughout his life Samuel knew the Lord and received constant reassurances and signs of God's presence.

We pray: *With Samuel as our model, may we faithfully and consistently listen for and answer God's call; may we serve as God's ambassadors to world, speaking hard truths to power as Samuel so bravely did; and may we always seek to care for the needs of others. Amen.*



**Thursday, September 23, 2021**

Text: Luke 1:26-32, 38, 46,47

*In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."*

*"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered, "May it be to me as you have said."*

*And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior"*

With Mary's call we enter the next phase of God's plan - his new covenant with his people and the ultimate sacrifice of God's only Son to pay the price for the sins of his people. With Mary we also have the example of "being known or set apart from birth." She was clearly devout and filled with love toward God. Her interactions with the angel Gabriel indicate her obedience and comfort with receiving God's word. Clearly she accepts her call and only questions just how this might be accomplished. As with the others, she is reassured that this is God's plan ("*Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God*"). Her acceptance and later the beautiful words of the Magnificat clearly indicate an understanding of her role in God's plan.

Was there also a sign? Actually yes there was. As we read further in verses 39-41, we find that Mary's cousin Elizabeth was also with child (even though thought to be barren). And the child Elizabeth was carrying (John the Baptist) "leaped in her womb" when Mary entered their home and greeted Elizabeth. Then Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaims her thanks and joy, "*that the mother of my Lord should come to me*" and further states, "*Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.*"

We pray: *May the example of these two trusting and faithful women inspire us. Guide us, Lord, to listen for your call that we may joyfully and unconditionally do your will, serve your people and share your love. Amen*



**Friday, September 24, 2021**

Text: Luke 3:1-3, 7-8, 10-14

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee...during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of the Lord came to John, son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of redemption for the forgiveness of sins...*

*John said to the crowd coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”*

*What should we do then?” the crowd asked. John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.” Tax collectors also came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.”*

*As Jesus began his ministry, John’s call and his role was clearly intentional. As written in Isaiah, John’s role was, “A voice of one crying in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.” John had also begun baptizing and baptized Jesus, while clearly indicating the distinction, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”*

From our previous reading, we know that John was also “known and set apart in the womb.” He and Jesus were related to each other and approximately the same age. Although we don’t know the details, John clearly accepted his call when (*the word of God came to John*) and received God’s assurance. His call required speaking hard truths to those in power, specifically Herod who locked John in prison where he was ultimately beheaded.

John’s advice to those who came to be baptized and asked “what should we do” remind us of what the prophets taught throughout the Old Testament. It represents the laws and commandments but with the specificity relative to the tax collector or the soldier and how not to abuse their power or office. And for everyone else, to be mindful of those in need and show compassion and generosity. In this way, John’s message serves as a preview of God’s new covenant through Jesus with his people.

We pray: *May John’s life and ministry inspire and lead us to seek and accept God’s call to us – to share the Good News of Jesus, to live generously and care for all in need, to protect and defend the persecuted, to speak the hard truths, and to do all these things through God’s love for all. Amen*





Saturday, September 25, 2021

Texts: Acts 9:3-6, 10-19 and Ephesians 4:1-6

***Meanwhile Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples...As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you persecuted," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."***

We know from further reading that the men with Saul saw nothing, that Saul was blind and for three days and did not eat or drink anything. God then calls upon a disciple, named Ananias, to accomplish the completion of Saul's call/conversion.

***The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."***

Of course Ananias is skeptical and fearful of the harm that Saul has promised to cause and (as in other examples) questions God's instructions and judgement.

***"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call upon your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.***

Ephesians 4: 1-6

***As a prisoner for the Lord then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism: one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.***

In the first passage from Acts, we read about Saul's call/conversion from the chief persecutor of Jesus' followers to God's "chosen instrument" to teach and preach to the Gentiles. The devout Jewish leader Saul, who rejected the teachings and ministry of Jesus, the Good News of his resurrection and ascension, and the ministry of his followers, has become the apostle Paul, who will preach and teach throughout their known world. Paul's conversion and his teaching, preaching and writings represent the next phase in God's new covenant with his people. In each

phase, we have examined the words of God's prophets and messengers and the ways in which they responded to God's call. And finally in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are urged to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received." Through these examples, may we be called to live such a life.

We pray: *God of all people, revealed in Jesus, we come to you asking that you expand and open our hearts. Teach us how to build a world that cares for the sick and the outsider and not just the seemingly healthy. Through your Holy Spirit, enable us to care for the sick, feed and clothe those in need, give comfort to those in prison, stand with those who are persecuted, and speak your truth each day. As we hear and answer your call to us, help us to build bridges of peace to all religions and cultures throughout the world, bridges of sharing, and bridges of love that we may eradicate hatred and divisions. Amen*

