

## **Jeremiah 1:4-10; 7:1-11**

Most prophetic books provide little or no information about the life of the prophet. In contrast, stories about the life of Jeremiah are one of the signature features of the book that bears his name. Narratives of imprisonment, commitment to God's commands, persecution, false accusations of treason, forced exile to Egypt, add a personal touch to his prophecies. Whether they are historically authentic or merely serve as literary devices, these accounts make the Book of Jeremiah as exhilarating as it is inspirational.

Jeremiah's home, Anathoth, is just three miles north of Jerusalem. He is a member of a priestly family that was displaced years earlier by Solomon. This priestly family had long been opposed to the ostentatious self-indulgence of the Davidic house – a trajectory of economic-military autonomy set in motion by Solomon. So, Jeremiah represented a theology grounded in hostility toward the very old and very deep Davidic establishment. With this backdrop, it seems that Jeremiah's call to ministry was a call to make public what he already felt in his heart. God calls Jeremiah to be God's spokesperson. And Jeremiah knows enough about this God business, to try to beg out of this prophetic assignment, a job he neither seeks nor welcomes.

Citing his young age, he objects. God, however, will not let Jeremiah's youth stand in the way of sending a message that the people of Israel need to hear. God is unmoved, commanding the young, afraid-to-speak Jeremiah to "go" and speak the words God gives him, promising that if Jeremiah gets into trouble, "I will rescue you." Reluctantly, Jeremiah says "yes" to God's call.

God lets Jeremiah know that he had plans for him while he was still in his mother's womb. Moses also protested God's call with a litany of fears and excuses; lack of confidence, limited skills, fear of rejection, and a speech impediment. Like Moses, Jeremiah protests that he is not good at public speaking. And just like Moses, Jeremiah is sent out and given the words he is to speak.

Jeremiah's call clearly echoes the story line of Moses, which in turn is echoed by that of Jesus. To speak prophetically is to follow God into a calling one would probably not have chosen. It is saying and doing things that anger one's friends and neighbours, things that, though supported by God, will only be seen as fruitful much later, following many trials and tribulations. No wonder Moses, Jeremiah, and others who were called, hesitated.

Living during a time of national transition and chaos meant that Jeremiah's critique is both urgent and necessary as he engages in the dangerous work of dismantling Judah's civic, cultural, and religious life. Jeremiah's critique will leave none unscathed.

As the narrative unfolds, it is apparent that Jeremiah's message is both difficult and unwelcome. His message captures the disaster that would see their world "plucked up and pulled down," "destroyed and overthrown." But in spite of this large-scale devastation, there is still the hope of building and planting, which foreshadows the hope that will be preached in the "Little Book of Consolation," as the final chapters of the Book of Jeremiah are known.

For people who had serious doubts about whether God is still with them,

particularly as circumstances caused them to wonder whether God had not forsaken them, the calling of Jeremiah emphasized that God is intimately involved with God's people.

In Jeremiah's temple sermon, he continues the theme of divine presence. However, in an ironic fashion, the promise of divine presence that was so important for Israel, is turned on its head. The sermon challenges the idea that God is in his temple, so we are safe; that God's presence in the temple of Jerusalem is like a kind of protective shield over Jerusalem that makes her invincible.

Jeremiah is faced with the reality that the temple and the city are not invincible as evident in the devastating Babylonian attacks that three times invaded Jerusalem and finally destroyed the temple. Dealing with this loss, Jeremiah warns against an uncritical claiming of the promise of God's presence for one's own personal sake. God is not a security blanket, nor can God be used like an amulet or magic wand to ward off danger.

The theme of God's presence, in Jeremiah's message, implies that: If God truly were in your midst in this worshipping community, you would be dealing justly with all people; you would not take advantage of those who are powerless; you would not commit violence against others. This perspective is captured when Jeremiah laments that the people have turned the temple into a den of robbers; a reference that would find its way into Jesus' sermon when he cleansed the temple from so-called bloodsucking money lenders.

The sermon ends with the ominous warning: "God is watching you!" – a

haunting reminder of God's presence that predicts nothing good for perpetrators. Injustice destroys us all. It has been shown that both the perpetrator and the victim suffer great harm, the oppressor becoming less than human by treating the oppressed in an inhumane fashion.

Throughout the biblical narrative, God uses ordinary, fallible human beings to serve as God's witnesses. The one and only way these ordinary prophets or witnesses are able to fulfill their calling is by having God work through them.

God often chooses those who others consider unlikely prospects to do God's work. Throughout scripture, we see God select the young, the weak, the outcasts, the poor, single parents, and the sinful to carry out special tasks!

God chose and consecrated Jeremiah for ministry even before his birth. When God approaches Jeremiah as a young teenager, he thinks God had to be mistaken. "Me a prophet, God? Why, you surely must be joking. I can't do that. I'm not ready for something like that. I'll think about it for a few years, and you come back when I'm older." Jeremiah wonders how anyone as young and inexperienced as he, can be expected to influence powerful kings and adult leaders. Very few of us know what our life's calling is at an early age. Many are middle aged before they discover what they want to be when they "grow up".

Since Jeremiah was born into a priestly family, there would have been a set of expectations awaiting him regardless of God's intervention. However Jeremiah may have thought of himself, he still felt very much like a fish out

of water. Very quickly he learned that **God does not call the equipped. Instead, God equips the called.** God promises to be present and to supply Jeremiah with the words that will accomplish God's purpose.

The task before Jeremiah is frightful. As a youth, Jeremiah is commanded to "forth-tell" the devastation of Israel, as well as to preach hope for a new way of life. When God calls, God also equips us with the skills we need in order to answer that call.

Jeremiah is called to be a prophet against his will, given a message he does not want to deliver, and is sent to a people who are not going to take his advice seriously. He will be punished and persecuted. It's a very risky business. In spite of the odds, he becomes a courageous and passionate proclaimer of God's message.

Erik Weihenmayer was about Jeremiah's age when he also found himself facing insurmountable odds. Erik was born with an eye disease that gradually unravelled his retinas, resulting in total blindness by the time he was thirteen. His mother died in an automobile accident around the same time. After throwing himself a pity party, Erik was determined to rise above his disability and to dream big. He struggled to overcome the limits that visual impairment placed on him and "see" the world with different senses. His mother had always prayed for him, and his father encouraged him to set sky-high goals, striving for mountaintops.

Through perseverance and hard work, Erik became a school teacher, acrobatic skydiver, skier, marathon runner, bicyclist, ice climber, rock

climber, and wrestler. Even more amazing, he is the first blind person to reach the summit of Mt. Everest. At an altitude of 13,000 feet on Mount Kilimanjaro, he married his childhood sweetheart, Ellie.

Zion, my previous congregation, supported the Olive Branch for Children, which Deborah had started in Tanzania. It began as a 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary project back in 2005. Deborah was a little older than Jeremiah when she responded to God's call. God had a plan for her, maybe even before she was born. She is devoting her life to helping some of the poorest, sickest, and neediest people of the world, witnessing to these people and showing them God's love through her work, through her love, in action.

She has established two homes for HIV orphans, providing them with shelter, nourishment, education and love. During Zion's anniversary year, we held two concerts and raised enough money for her to open Zion Home which started with six HIV orphans and now continuously cares for over thirty as some graduate and move on. Deborah has been instrumental in the building of over thirty Montessori kindergartens in the most remote villages of Tanzania, as well as providing on-going teacher training with volunteers from Canada.

Micro-financing and basic business training helps widows, abandoned women, and grandmothers, start small businesses to provide for themselves and their families. Medical support and clinics have saved hundreds of lives with the help of trained home-based care workers assigned to each village. Tens of thousands have directly or indirectly been touched by the work of the Olive Branch.

Despite being born with a silver spoon in her mouth; attending private schools and the University of Edinburgh, Deborah's path has been challenging. The obstacles have been numerous and challenges ongoing, financial support and personnel support being the greatest. And just like with Jeremiah, somehow things work out. God takes care of those he calls. Through trust and prayer, the rewards and successes speak for themselves as seen through the eyes of joy, appreciation, love and improved chances at life for God's children in Tanzania. Most of them have gone on to post secondary education in a variety of subjects; law, agriculture, hospitality, and teaching.

I had the opportunity to go to Tanzania twice to visit Zion Home and do some volunteer work in its various programs; leading Bible Studies, baptizing our first group of HIV orphans, home visitations in remote villages to determine the needs of the people, looking after an HIV positive baby in the hospital, teaching home-based care workers pastoral care. For a couple of years we had monthly worship services with Zion Home via internet.

God called many others to witness and to help Deborah with the task God has given her. Countless volunteers, mostly young people from around the world, volunteered their time and efforts to bring to fruition God's great plan for the children and people in this region of the world. Volunteers have come from Canada, United States, Germany, Denmark, France, Spain, Ireland, England and Costa Rica. For a while I processed and prepared the volunteers for Tanzania.

There are many amazing and awe-inspiring stories of the volunteers who are now part of the Olive Branch ministry and witness. One of the volunteers even wrote and published a book of her experience. I know that every one of the volunteers, including me and my daughter who accompanied me on the first trip, had a life-changing experience. They will never see the world in the same way again. Their priorities, what is most important in life, what it means to respond to God's call, have changed for them. In sharing their experiences, they are witnesses to God's great love for all the world. And it is through their actions that they show the people they minister to, what God's love is all about. Young people such as Jeremiah, Erik, Deborah and all those wonderful volunteers, are a powerful inspiring witness to God's love for the world.

Jeremiah delivers God's message to a people who had not kept covenant faith with God. Many have begun to worship other gods. Jeremiah is called to address an audience that thought of itself as religious, even though it had failed to apply its faith to issues of justice and honourable living. Jeremiah notes that the leaders and people had placed more trust in gaining prosperity at the expense of others, hoarding their gifts, than in seeking justice in their land. They had lost sight of their mission as people of God. Jeremiah wants them to replace their old values with ones that a godly life demands; justice, generosity, compassion, love toward one's neighbour.

Even in the midst of disaster and defeat, Jeremiah speaks a word of promise to the people. Their troubles will end, and God will make a new covenant with them. The law will no longer be an external set of rules on tablets or scrolls, but an internal set of values and directives. The people will know in their



hearts what is right, and will want to be obedient.

Being chosen by God is an awesome responsibility. God has prepared a destiny for each of us. We may feel overwhelmed and inadequate, just as Jeremiah did. We are chosen and called to carry out God's mission and ministry here in this place at this particular time. Our challenge is to identify and name that mission and ministry to which we are called. God can use **our** God-given talents and abilities in marvellous and remarkable ways; as individuals and as a community of faith. When we step out in faith in response to God's call, God will direct our steps, no matter how difficult the path before us.

Jeremiah's call speaks to our call as Christians. We are all called by God from the moment of our creation for one purpose: life with God. Witness through our words and actions is our "yes" to God's call. While we might not be called to be an international sign like Jeremiah, we are called to make a difference in our community and in our world.

Witness requires courage and honesty. We might shrink away from the demands of witness, like Jeremiah was tempted to do. But as God promised Jeremiah, God will not leave us devastated. Just as Jeremiah discovered: **God does not call the equipped. Instead, God equips the called.** God will strengthen us for any challenge that comes our way, as long as we put all our trust in God's plan for each one of us; for our church, for our congregation, for our community. How has God's call challenged us to reach out to others? How does God challenge the people of Grace to reach out to others in love, to use the gifts God has given us, to change our community,

to change our world? How will we answer God's call?

**Amen.**

## **PRAYERS of the PEOPLE for JUNE 22, 2025**

Holy God, you knew us before we took our first breath. You uttered your living Word and brought forth light, love, and life. You gathered us from the dust of the earth and called us your people. You sent us into the world to proclaim the good news of your lavish love and your mighty and wondrous deeds. You are with us even now as we continue our life-long journey of discipleship as your followers. Compassionate God, hear today the prayers that we lift up to you.

Merciful God, we are so grateful that your love never ends. We confess to you that we do not always share your love with others as we should. Where you have called us to live as one body, we too often exist as divided members. Where you have called us to generously share our Spirit-given gifts, we ignore your invitation to be co-creators in your kingdom come. Where you have called us to forgive, we have forgotten your gift of grace and mercy.

We pray for the world: for the resolution of all wars, conflicts and violence around the world: the Israel-Iran conflict; the Israel-Syria cross-border hostilities; the Israel-Gaza-West Bank hostilities, the Ukraine-Russia conflict. We pray for the upcoming NATO talks. Give world leaders the vision and the resolve to work together to de-escalate world conflicts rather than allowing things to spiral further into war in parts of our world, especially in the Middle East. Your people live in fear as rockets and drones fly, destroying homes, schools and hospitals. Bring peace to your amazing creation. Help to calm the conflicts, the hatred, and the striving for power over others that give birth to violence. Help all people and leaders to realize that we are all your children, to be loved and cared for.

We thank you for the gift of freedom that many of us enjoy in our lives. We remember those whose lives are still oppressed and marginalized through political, social and economic systems that prevent them from accessing and enjoying the same freedoms and liberties as others. Here, in Canada, we give thanks for the rich heritage of our Indigenous peoples, whose numerous cultures, languages, laws and values undergird their respect for others and the ongoing stewardship of our lands and waters to present times. May their voices be integral in the ongoing work of truth and reconciliation. We remember the history of black people where multiple generations were enslaved and prohibited from living freely as others. We mark the liberation from slavery as we celebrate Juneteenth. May we remember those who gave their lives in the fight for their freedoms, through conflicts and protests, and personal sacrifices for the sake of others. We pray that you raise up leaders who continue to fight for justice and help to bring about freedom for all.

We lift up prayers for refugees, migrants, and immigrants around the world: Holy God, as you have accompanied your people through times of captivity, wilderness, and exile, shelter and sustain all those who flee persecution, oppression, warfare, violence, hunger, and poverty. Open our hearts and homes, our gates and doors, so that they find safety, peace, and welcome – a place to live in freedom and without fear; through Jesus Christ, our refuge and hope.

Let your blessing encourage those who work for peace even when the only result seems to be more violence. Bless the ongoing work of those who preach and live the Gospel in the face of persecution, who feed the hungry despite the danger to themselves as they stand up for the downtrodden and suffering.

We pray for those who are lonely and depressed, those who are physically, mentally, or emotionally unwell, those who are struggling with various addictions. Give them courage, strength, and faith. Surround them with support as they yearn for your restoration and healing. We also lift up to you those who we bring before you with our lips or in the silence of our hearts ... We pray for those who are waiting for medical results, those who are undergoing treatments, those recovering from surgery. We pray that the Spirit of God's love will strengthen them and bring them to wholeness quickly. We are thankful for all the caring doctors, nurses, and health care workers. Give guidance and wisdom to scientists and doctors searching for cures and vaccines.

We pray for all who are isolated from God and the human family: that they may experience welcome and acceptance as they encounter the Christian community. In this month we especially raise up our 2SLGBTQI+ siblings. We pray for a greater sense of genuine community: that we may appreciate the wonder in the unique and diverse gifts of each person and work together to address the needs and longings of all who enter our lives.

We pray for the Church: that we may recognize our call to be children of God as we follow God's call in our lives, our churches, and our communities. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; for our Bishop Susan as she retires from her position, Bishop Kathy, acting Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Anne Germond. Guide the discussions of the General Synod of the Anglican church as they elect their next bishop. In our BC Synod we pray for Good Shepherd Lutheran in Coquitlam - Rev. Eric Krushel and Trinity Lutheran in Delta - Rev. Jennifer Wilson. We pray for the congregations and bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church; Bishop Azar and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land; our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. Bless the ministries of all pastors,

priests, deacons, musicians, lay leaders and volunteers.

Gracious God, do not be far from us! Strengthen us that we might be generous givers of your grace. May your steadfast love be known to all your children. Send your Holy Spirit to empower us to be your hands and feet: to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to support the unhoused, and to love all as you have first loved us. Holy Friend, please reach out your hand over each of us gathered here now, that our faith may be enlarged and fortified, our vision enlightened and broadened, and our compassion refreshed and made abundant. Through Jesus of Nazareth, whose love was good enough for the simple, too much for the proud and powerful, and absolutely amazing for all who shared his cup. These things we pray in the name of your Son, who taught us to pray ...

**Our Father ...**