

## “Calling”

(Second of Epiphany, a Sermon preached at the Anglican Church in Zwolle, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2017).

Passages: Jeremiah 1:4-10, Mark 1:14-20

Prayer: Lord, may these spoken words, be faithful to the written word, and may they lead us to the living Word, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Calling is the great theme across our two readings. Jeremiah is one of the great Old Testament prophets, and like Ezekiel and Isaiah, in our Old Testament (OT) scriptures we can hear, in their own words, how they were called to their ministries. Today we hear from Jeremiah himself how he was called...

And in Mark’s Gospel, a gospel written by Mark as informed by people like Peter, we hear how it all began for the men who became the pillars of the early Christian Church – a calling by the Sea of Galilee.

And as we reflect, we consider what we learn about our personal calling and our calling as a church, part of the Body of Christ here in the Netherlands.

### **Jeremiah’s Calling**

Right from the start, we see it is *God* who has chosen Jeremiah. He is chosen, just because God chooses him. Like David, like Moses, Abraham, like Isaiah and Ezekiel. We can look back and

see why they were called, but at the time, did they, did Jeremiah ask himself – who am I that God would call me? Or why me? But perhaps the idea would have struck him – *why not me?*

God reveals Jeremiah's foreordination – in three phrases, '*I knew you*'... '*I set you apart*', '*I appointed you*'. In the United Kingdom, a long running tv programme, on BBC, is 'The Apprentice', as a senior businessman, Alan Sugar, (as you know Donald Trump was the businessman in the USA version), seeks to know the men and women in front of him. Over time *he sets them apart* – by firing the others, until one is left. And then, he *appoints* him – a post in his company or to be his business partner. A process of time and as you watch it, and listen, you see how he grows in his understanding – he thought he knew this man or woman, but he really didn't and so fires them etc... Yet the LORD says, '*I knew you*' – when you were a foetus in the womb, you were set apart before you came out of the womb, and he appointed Jeremiah. The Lord knew and had a plan for Jeremiah. It is an awesome statement – Psalm 139 expresses this wonderful idea also – that God is omnipotent – he is all knowing – but we can express this in another way – we cannot say he has been distant or uninvolved in our lives – he has formed us in the womb, the psalm says, he has known us when we were tiny in the womb... God who is not distant and uninvolved, but close, involved and he has a plan for our lives.

But also, Jeremiah has always been God's plan. It is not a case, that God has tried others, and he is now forced to turn to Jeremiah. Before he was born, he was appointed and set apart. In football, clubs often will seek to purchase a player. But at times the transfer does not succeed and they purchase another player instead of the one they wanted. Sometimes the manager

will say, after the successful transfer, that this was the player they ALWAYS wanted, when in fact most people know he was second choice... Jeremiah is not second choice, a desperate last choice to sort out Israel. He is PLAN A and there is no other plan and was no other one.

And I would suggest this speaks to us here. The Lord knows us – he knows our church here in Zwolle, very well, better we know ourselves. He however, has plans for us, in his kingdom purposes for this city and perhaps beyond. And he has appointed us for his tasks – there is no other plan, the Lord God seeks to use his church in his work as his primary means to do his work and reveal his love to the world. The Lord has always had a plan for Zwolle Anglican Church to be part of his work in Zwolle and further afield.

But Jeremiah then speaks. He doesn't jump up and down in joy at the calling. He is very similar to Moses, who resists God's calling to return to Egypt, raising lots of issues, until finally at the end of it all in Exodus 4, he says – 'please send someone else'! The same is true for today. I remember the vicar of the church where I was at university, saying he didn't believe anyone was called to the ordained ministry unless they wrestled against it. Jeremiah says – 'Alas Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak. I am too young.' In the Hebrew, he uses a word – Hinnēh which translated means 'Behold' and the use draws attention to the words or statement to follow. He says – 'behold Lord, I don't know how to speak I am too young'. It use suggests he is saying: 'Lord, excuse me, you may not be aware of this, but let me say about my age and my speech...' Jeremiah is very aware of his weaknesses, in his eyes, in people's eyes, and his personal limitations. And it is a good sign for he understands the task he is

being invited to play, a spokesman for the King of the Universe, the Creator of the World, a spokesman who will build up and plant, who will uproot and destroy, a spokesperson for God at a time when God's people are often not faithful to their Lord God. Jeremiah looks at the task, and says 'I cannot do this'. How many times have we said that, about something we feel God is asking of us or wants us to say or do?

Is it possible we can do that as a church and say, 'look at us, who we are, our finances, our numbers, how can we be part or used for God's kingdom purposes, we are just trying to keep going here.' I mean over the last couple of weeks I've said to God, looking at the task of All Saints Anglican Church – a wonderful task of starting and establishing a new church but a huge challenge and responsibility – am I good enough God for this? Can I do this? Am I too young – maybe I need more years... Looking at my limitations, my weaknesses.

What does God say? Does he help him or reassure him – not really! God says '*do not say I am too young you must go to everyone I send you...*' God does not give him comfort, or a rationale why he has chosen him, God redirects his focus, '*Don't look at your weaknesses God is saying, look at the task I am giving you*'. As someone said – he may not believe in himself, but God believes in him. We may not believe in ourselves but God believes in us.

After redirecting the focus, comes the comfort and encouragement. God says – '*do not be afraid*' – if not the most common phrase in the bible, then the next one is – '*I will be with you*.' Reassurance not that – **YOU** can do it...but 'don't be afraid I will be with you.' Then he equips Jeremiah – he touches his

mouth. Again that word ‘behold’ (hinneh), used by God – drawing attention – *‘I have put my words in your mouth’*. As sure as Jeremiah got up that morning, he has received the necessary words from God – he has been equipped for the task and calling and commissioning God has placed upon him.

Jeremiah is chosen, he is commissioned, he is commanded, he is equipped, he is supported, he is comforted, he is encouraged, and off he goes, through struggle and success, to become one of Israel’s greatest prophets.



### **The first disciples’ calling**

And in Mark chapter 1, we again see **calling**. The Lord Jesus’ ministry begins, after his baptism, after John the Baptist has

been arrested and imprisoned by Herod. He proclaims the message like a herald – *'the kingdom of God is near.'* The reign of God is coming.

But Mark shows us the first thing Jesus does after proclaiming – he gathers some people! He forms a community. Later, in Mark 3, it says the disciples were *'they might be with him and that he might send them out'* (3:14). Jesus and his disciples shared life together. We see some of these moments – how they travel together, eat together, they see him pray and so on. When we shared about our direction as a church, last summer, we shared about how we want to be a worshipping, praying, learning, missionary church but also a caring church. Community. There are different types of community. At All Saints we are using the phrase DEEP community. You could say every church is a community. But what type? One of my two churches was in suburban area called Lawley. I remember a couple of lovely older church members Betty and Peggy especially who would share memories of people going in and out of each other's doors and looking out for each other and sharing. Lawley in their era, was a close knit community. And then I heard stories of the modern 2015 community in Lawley where no one knew each other or local people even said, "there was no community in Lawley." So we seek, I'd suggest to be a caring church, meaning a deep community not only where we welcome people into the heart of the this church community but where we can share our vulnerabilities, like Jeremiah does to God, a safe space where we can talk honestly knowing, we are still loved by people even if we say what we think or how we doubt.

Jesus here acts very similar to God's calling of Jeremiah. The four men are chosen, we do not know why but they are.

They are commissioned and commanded – ‘*come follow me and I will make you fishers of people*’. The task is revealed.

They will be equipped – Jesus says – *I will make* – he does not say – ‘come follow me and go fish for people’, he says, ‘*I will make you*’. These men are later described as disciples – the greek word means learner, student, or returning to Sir Alan Sugar and Donald Trump and their programmes, the word can also mean – ‘apprentice’. These words suggest a disciple is someone learning on the job, always learning. As we call ourselves Christian, in the eyes of Mark, a follower of Jesus is a disciple of Jesus and a disciple, is a life long one – life long follower, and a life long learner.

And when Jesus says *I*, it suggests *he* will be with them – at least at this initial stage, which will comfort and encourage them. Actually at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, we have the great commission where Jesus looks at his disciples, 3 years on, from when he called them from their boats and says – ‘*go and make disciples...*’ but then he adds, and ‘*I will be with you to the end of the age*’. So by his Spirit, he is with them, and today with us in the tasks he has called us to – as a church and as Christians where we live and work and have retired...

### **A church’s calling**

As Christians, we are commissioned and commanded, to be part of God’s purposes in his world.

He promises to equip us by his Holy Spirit.

We gain comfort and encouragement that he will be with us and will support us in the work he would have us do as individual Christians, but also as a Anglican Church.

His work may be work only here in this city, it may be work here in the Netherlands also, or may even be work which goes beyond these borders.

We want this year, to be asking the Lord of the Church not only what he would have us do individually as Christians where we live, work and have retired, but what he would have us do as a church to show and proclaim and share the good news of the kingdom of God....

**Shall we pray...**

God of all mercy,  
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,  
release to the captives,  
and freedom to the oppressed:  
anoint us with your Holy Spirit,  
Use us in your purposes  
And may people discover the freedom of your kingdom  
and come to praise you in Christ our Lord.  
We ask this in the name of your Son.  
Amen.