

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.” Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a lad.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a lad’ for wherever I send you, you shall go & whatever I charge you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

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

I knew you.

I called you.

I appointed you.

God holds Jeremiah tenderly like a babe needing to hear a lullaby of truth. I know this feels like an uphill ask; an impossible feat but the truth is I know you, I molded you... I've got you.

What a comfort to hear from the creator's mouth - a comfort that extends to each of us sitting in these pews today and around the world listening.

Just as much as this moment is for Jeremiah it is for each of us, too. For how often do we need a reminder in the midst of chaos and confusion...that we are God's and made for such a time as this?

To become aware of what this passage means for us today, I think, we need to dive deeper into what this call moment was for Jeremiah and equally what it was not.

Jerusalem had experienced a flourishing of good times and the scales were edging ever so closely to a re-balancing toward a violent, and destructive period of the Isarelites history. Kings were colluding with one another in secret and countries were becoming greedy for more land and riches. Jerusalem was about to face its ultimate test of faith...being no more and then rebuild once more.

There would be much weeping and much rebuilding in the years to come and God knew that tenderness would be an antidote and collaboration would be needed.

Jeremiah would have been in his 20's at this moment of God's pep talk. A young lad ready to take on the world and at the same time maybe sit out a few rounds. I remember being in my 20s robust with enthusiasm for the world ahead of me and equally eager to blend in out of fear of what might happen if I did indeed step up. I wonder at this point in Jeremiah's life how many opportunities he might have watched drift by to participate in his world out of some similar fear. And I say this knowing deeply at the ripe grand age of 34 now, that these thoughts still circulate. And you know what, God knows too.

So God does what any reasonable parent does for any age child of heart, pulls up a chair and says, "let's get intimate and talk a bit."

In fact, as my Hebrew Bible loving self can attest, this is a **VERY FANCY** talk because if you can look at your Bible you'll see the conversation is indented...meaning this is poetry you're reading. It's more tender and intimate than regular quotations ... This indention is meant to slow the reader down to sit with the tender offering of this exchange. What makes this even more impressive and beautiful is that when this part of Jeremiah's story was being compiled it would have been after the fall of Jersueulm. Meaning there was no temple, there was Jersueulm to worship in, there were no systems that existed previously...everything was different and new ways needed to be constructed and the writers of Jermiah said...we must remember that God was tender and God said do not be afraid and God said...they would save us.

Here we are today Faith reading this poetry being asked by our faith ancestors to slow down and digest every word of this rare conversation between God and Jeremiah. It's a gift that we get to do this together.

Jeremiah tried to pull the age card of doubt. A seed I think society has been planting for a billion years into our soil. I can't do that just yet... I just started my PhD program... My babe is only 3 years old who will watch him? ... I have no time ... someone else will step in before me ... the need just can't be that important that you need me!?

A cycle wheel of doubt, excuses, imposter syndrome narratives and delay might have rattle through Jeremiah's head for a lifetime...but God quickly and tenderly asserts the truth - I'm not going to take your took young or busy for an answer...you will go and do and your fear will wilt before you because I am with you and I will save you.

And, there it is the tender pat on the back, the hand hold ... the embrace... yes there's the charge Jeremiah receives to go and do as God asks... but there's the remembrance of God's intimate share at the beginning of their talk...

Before I formed you, I knew you. I'll be with you. I'll save you. I'll see you through it.

And as if God knew we needed more assurance in times of upheaval and confusion, God does something that no other prophet experiences... God touches Jeremiah.

God reaches out and touches Jeremiah's lips. As almost to symbolize... I formed these lips for the word and actions of my love through you.

Remember when I said at the beginning we needed to dive deeper into what this call moment was for Jeremiah and equally what it was not?

Jeremiah's call story especially the final verses we read have been used to inflict violence, genocide, colonization and in our present moments an ethic that extends far beyond what God truly placed on Jeremiah's lips that day.

To pluck up and pull down to destroy and to build and to plant... does not mean that we in the name of God to go and participate in taking the land of those before us or inflicting hatred in the name of glory.

What God is painting here for Jeremiah is the future of Jerusalem. That someone will come and do just that - pluck up, pull down, destroy. And that because God formed Jeremiah and the people of God (of whom we belong to) we will respond not in anger or violence but by renewal and planting of God's love still.

This is why God touching Jeremiah's lips - our lips - is so important before these verses... God placed a responsibility on us to speak the love and salvation of God; not destruction, violence or ambivalence.

God touches our lips, forms us and holds us tenderly for the sake of the covenant that we are kin to one another; siblings in Christ who care for the stranger and neighbor alike and love in the face of hatred and we do indeed build new things.

These last two years Faith have been full of building new things. Our ministry reaches far and wide and our community is full of unique talents, gifts and care. Right now, we are participating in God's call in the ways we hold our refugee family with love, the way we welcome Penn State students back - to the way we greet one another each Sunday and the way we'll partake in communion together in just a few moments.

I wonder for us Faith, who we will become in this new era... I wonder for us if Jeremiah's call can be a reminder that indeed before God formed us as a church and community, God knew us. God was busy holding us, nourishing us for this moment. What new things can we sew into our community? What ways can we pick up what may have been laid down for rest and help nourish one another as we grow? I will be wondering that with you Faith. And I encourage us to talk to one another as we dream, build, and plant fresh gardens together.

My ask of us is to hold the tender words of God as we grow as a church and grow as siblings in Christ ... perhaps this looks like writing it out on a piece of paper and tucking it away in your wallet to find ... or a sticky note on your bathroom mirror But hold this loving offering from God so that we may go out into the world and be the people of God we are called to be...

Formed, known, loved, seen, called to be prophets of God's love together and held by a God who offers us salvation from the woes around us, always.

May it be so

