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Bethel sermon August 19, 2018 - PK Teacher Recognition

Jeremiah 1:4-10

⁴Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, ⁵“Before I formed you in your mother’s womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” ⁶Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” ⁷But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” ⁹Then 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. ¹⁰See, 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.”

Call Me Maybe

Ring Ring

Hey

I just met you...

Well this is Crazy...

Okay, here’s my number...

Call me maybe!

So.... ☺ For those of you who didn’t recognize the words of that conversation, "*Call Me Maybe*" is a song recorded by Canadian singer-songwriter Carly Rae Jepsen. This song was her hit single in 2012. Even though some of you listening this morning may have never heard of the song, trust me, some of us have heard it many, *many* times!!! It’s one of those songs that just get stuck in your head and replays continually until you can find something to take its place.

Musically it’s not a masterpiece. Jepsen wasn’t well known, or popular before writing this song. She didn’t have a large following or previous claims to fame other than placing third in the 2007 Canadian Idol television program. She didn’t become a household name until releasing “Call Me Maybe” The lyrics are simple, with every repetitive chorus ending with, “call me, maybe?”

Now we aren’t here to debate popular music, or to find hidden meanings in the lyrics of songs. We are here to talk about a call. Not a phone call, but the ultimate call, the call of God on our lives. And while preparing for my sermon this week, I decided that the chorus of *Call Me Maybe* sounds a lot like our scripture lesson today.

This morning our text is known as the call of Jeremiah, one of God’s greatest prophets.

We see a similar pattern followed throughout Scripture of how God continually calls people to follow him. 4 things seem to happen:

- First, God comes in and interrupts someone's life; interrupts someone's current way of thinking or living or believing.
- Next, God issues some sort of orders or directives that would require this person to think or act or live differently than they had before.
- Next, the person that God is calling often tries to resist the calling... "*hey I just met you, and this is CRAZY...*"
- After that person tries to resist, God insists, reassures, and empowers the individual to live into all that God is calling them to.

This morning I want us to think about the resisting that we, as humans, so often do in response to God's call. See, often our resisting makes a whole lot of sense. It is not always an excuse. Often we have very good reasons for our resisting God's leading. For Jeremiah, he knew he wasn't a very good speaker and he knew he was young. He was aware that there were people much better equipped to do all that God was asking, others who people would be more willing to listen to.

Think of the others who have tried to resist God's call.

- There's Moses who told God he wasn't qualified because, well, he really wasn't. He had no idea how to relate to and lead the Israelites because he had actually grown up in Pharaoh's palace.
- Then there is Sarah who laughed and said she was too old to have a child because she *was* too old.
- And of course you know your preacher told God she wasn't qualified to be a minister, because she hadn't taken a single class on religion and she much preferred singing Broadway show tunes to Charles Wesley hymns! ☺

These are not excuses. They are legitimate concerns, and very good reasons for resisting God's leading. Based on personal knowledge and experience, these claims made perfect sense. And so it is with Jeremiah. It's not even like he told God to "call me maybe" it was more like he said, "you are crazy to call me at all!"

So, if it sounds like Jeremiah was unsure, maybe even afraid of God's call on his life, it was for good reason. Because, to become God's great prophet, Jeremiah would have to change.

Who loves change? Anyone?

When you came to church this morning you changed out of your pajamas to put on clothes to wear to church. You may have gained style or modesty, but in the process of changing clothes, you lost the comfort of those cozy pajamas. Every change we make means a loss of something else.

So when God interrupts us, like with Jeremiah, and gives us a new direction to take, we often resist for very good reasons. We know our personal boundaries, and we know where we are most comfortable, and where we thrive. We resist because we are fearful of losing those places of comfort in our life.

God's call on our life always involves change, a transformation. And the most primal and human response to any kind of change is fear. Again, this fear is often for good reason because if God is asking us to do something different, calling us into a different way of life, then that inevitably means that we are losing something we currently hold dear.

When God called Mother Theresa to become a nun and to go to Calcutta to live with those considered the 'least of these,'

- God was also inherently calling her to give up all comforts of a very wealthy upbringing.
- God was asking her to give up the possibility of being able to save for retirement,
- or to be near her friends and family, — even to have regular showers.
- Following God's voice did not only mean looking ahead, but also required a willingness to leave other things, even some GOOD things, behind;
- to overcome the fear of losing what she already had.

Throughout scripture we see good people resisting God's call. And what does God do? God recites the constant refrain that is found in today's lesson and throughout scripture, "Do not be afraid." And then God insists, reassures, and empowers us to live into ALL God is calling us to.

What is especially interesting in Jeremiah's call story is that God calls Jeremiah to do the *same* thing that God is doing *in* Jeremiah. Just as God is asking Jeremiah to overcome his fear, and bury his old way of thinking about himself, his abilities, and his usefulness, so that God may use him for something new, God is also appointing him to proclaim and to enact the same message: *To pluck up and pull down, To destroy and overthrow, THEN to build up and to plant.*

There must be something important to this process of needing to bury the old way before the new can grow. But, oh, how we dread this process. We would much prefer for God to just add on to what already exists. We don't want to tear down the house in order to build

a new one; we just want to buy some Pine-Sol to clean up what we already have so that we can keep what we own... so we can hold on to what is comfortable to us. But, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God empowers us, and inspires us with proof that -- out of loss, (even the loss of life itself!) we can receive the greatest gift imaginable.

Putting to death our old way of life and all our fears to follow God is not easy, but we know something better will always arise from it. One commentary I read this week put it like this: *“no good life from God can grow without our dying to our old self, as old priorities are tossed aside, the house of cards is cast down, so that something much better and much stronger can be built.”*¹

My friend hear the Good News: 2,000 years ago God came to earth, not to clean us up, but to RE-CREATE us, to make us NEW that we might be born again. And this can be scary. It can be difficult because, as humans, we are a people who really like what is comfortable to us, right? And yet, God continues to call each and every one of us out of our comfort zones into his holy purposes.

The Message Bible puts our scripture text like this, *“Before you were born, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you!”* God claims us before we are even born. When a baby is baptized, we sing “God claims you!” And when we join the church we claim God for ourselves. God knows us intimately, and has holy plans for each of our lives.

I’ve got a favor to ask of you this morning. If you have ever answered “YES” to God’s call, please stand. We’ve already celebrated our PK teachers this morning, so they can lead they way — for teaching our little ones is certainly a wonderful calling! Okay - now, if you have ever served God through the church, please stand.

- This might mean serving as a greeter for worship, cooking a dish for Family Night Supper, participating in the Good News Club, Leading Boy Scouts, playing in our REACH band, singing in the choir, helping with Vacation Bible School, polishing the brass, filling communion cups, visiting the sick, praying for those on our prayer list, teaching Sunday school, serving as a Visiting Buddy, working with Family Promise, preparing our annual church audit, or just showing up every Sunday morning to make sure the lights our lit and the doors are open.

¹ Feasting on the Word

Look around. Let's recognize and celebrate those in our midst who have heard God's call upon their lives and responded YES. Even though they knew it would be hard. Even though they knew there were others who were probably more qualified. Even though it meant they would have to change. Thanks be to God!

My friends, I would love to help you discover God's call and plans for your life. Let's pray together this morning that God will "call me MAYBE" – and pray that God will call you DEFINITELY! And you too will be transformed in answering yes to God's holy call. May it be so. Amen!

PRAY WITH ME: Most loving God, you have called us and given us the honor of serving you. But we like what we have. We like our lives the way they are. For some of us, it has been a while since we heard your voice, and we want to have your fire burning in our heart once again. Give us a love for you that is greater than our fear. Remind us that you have something far better for us than what we have created for ourselves. Insist, reassure, and empower us to seek after you, no matter the cost. This we pray in your holy name, AMEN.