

January 30, 2022

**“Part of Something Big”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,

“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 boy.” But 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.

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.”

Luke 4:21-30

Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke

well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not

this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure

yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you

did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s

hometown.

*But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut
up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was*

sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in

Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the

Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him

out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they

might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Sermon “Part of Something Big”

What a beautiful call story we just read in Jeremiah, the best prophets are always the most reluctant to begin their ministry. “What, who me? Noooo! I wouldn’t be any good at that!”

Now listen to this scripture again in a modern translation and I want you to close your eyes, breathe deep and picture and hear God saying this directly to you, speaking to your heart.

“Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you.
Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you:
A prophet to the nations— that’s what I had in mind for you.”
But I said, “Hold on there Lord! Look at me.

I don’t know anything. I’m only a child!”
then God said “Don’t say, ‘I’m only a child.’
I’ll tell you where to go and you’ll go there.

I’ll tell you what to say and you’ll say it. Don’t be afraid of anyone or anything
Because I’ll be right there, looking after you.”
then God reached out, and touched my mouth, and said,

“Look! I’ve just put my words in your mouth.
See what I’ve done? I’ve given you a job to do among nations and governments
Your job is to pull up and tear down, take apart and demolish,
And then start over, building and planting.”

Okay, open your eyes. Do you feel that? That deep call and connection we each have? God is pulling us in the direction of a better, more loving and just world.

We are called by our faith to tear down those things that hinder equity and justice among all nations. We are called to hold governments accountable for letting their people go hungry or be enslaved.

We are called to demolish those things that hinder us from knowing God and serving God and God’s people but we can’t stop there, we have to be a part of the building and planting as well. And you are, by being a part of this church, you are about tearing down and building and planting already.

In response to the injustices in Christianity and culture, you sought to tear down and demolish the sexism, homophobia and racism and ableism that kept people from feeling welcome in a

church and boldly declared yourself “Open and Affirming” of ALL people and you have worked hard to live into that.

And as far as building and planting listen to this right off of The Saukville Community Food Pantry website. It reads that it started with a question. “Why don’t we have something like this in Saukville?”

The question was raised by several young people from St. Peter’s UCC (now Parkside) on a youth mission trip to Cleveland Ohio in 2010. Two adults and twelve youth went to work in soup kitchens, food pantries and community gardens in Cleveland.

The youth on the trip were inspired as well as the adults and when the question was raised the response was, why don’t we? There is some more history there but eventually it came down to us having a food pantry in our basement. It is its own non-profit agency now, but it started with a moment in our congregation where members let themselves be called into something new.

Here’s what I want you to take away from this morning. We aren’t alone, for generation after generation, congregation after congregation we are the United Church of Christ and we are part of a denomination who has always answered God’s call to both tear down and build up. To tear down injustice and build up those things that serve the needs of God’s people.

You are part of a denomination that has built countless hospitals, schools, universities, seminaries, orphanages, senior living facilities and half-way houses, women’s shelters, the list goes on and on.

What I want you to hear is that you are a part of that, every time you put a dollar in the plate a part of it goes, to help a homeless person find affordable housing, it goes to a child in need of counseling, and an abuse shelter for domestic violence, it goes to help fund care for seniors, to feed somebody, to clothe somebody.

I don’t say all that so you will give more, you are already a generous lot, I say that so that you feel some pride and inspiration in who we are. *You are a part of the United Church of Christ.* A denomination that believes that the purpose of life is to serve God and leave the world a little better than you found it and make sure ALL God’s children know they are loved.

You stand in a line of people of faith that stretches back to the first pilgrims who came looking for a place to practice their faith without fear of being killed for it. We were the first mainline Protestant denomination to ordain an African American man, Rev. Lemuel Haynes, the year our nation was born in 1776.

One of your ancestors of faith was the first ordained woman way back in 1853 Antoinette Brown. You walk in the footsteps of people who answered God's call again and again to stand up against slavery and for equal rights.

You are a part of the first denomination to ordain a gay minister in 1972, Rev. Bill Johnson. It would be 32 years before another denomination would follow suit.

We had the first black President of our denomination, and in the nineties we were the first church to start using inclusive language for God in our hymnal and book of worship, using both male and female images for God that were already present in our scriptures.

And we were the only denomination that took a stand for marriage equality in 2005. It would be a decade before the Supreme Court came to the same conclusion. We should all be proud of being a part of the UCC and be inspired.

I ask you to consider what God is calling you to do now both as individuals and as a church. We are talking about God here so the *possibilities are endless!* What words is God putting in your mouth that need to be spoken to the broken? What words are we to speak to the nations and the kingdoms?

Words that might get you run out of town like they did Jesus. Living into your call and our call will not always make you popular, but that isn't the point is it.

The point is to serve God and leave the world a better place. It doesn't have to be something as huge as founding a hospital or a food pantry, it can be something simple like helping out a friend or neighbor, donating to your favorite charity, the kingdom of God will be built on small acts of kindness too. And while you are serving God, remember this promise: "Don't be afraid of anyone or anything, I'll be right there, looking after you." AMEN

Copyright 2022 Rev. Susan Drake
All Rights Reserved



**Don't be afraid
of anyone
or anything,
I'll be right there,
looking after you.**

REV. SUSAN DRAKE