

BGCW 1/31/10 Worship Theme: Called to Love Jeremiah 1: 4-10, I Corinthians 12:31-13:13, Luke 4: 21-30

Next Sunday we will be taking up a special offering for the ministry of MOPS, Mothers of Pre-Schoolers. This Sunday, I will talk about this ministry in the context of today's scripture lessons.

Last Sunday, Stephanie Prescott hit the nail on the head when she announced that being part of MOPS is a calling. I agree that she, Jessica Jessen, Dallas Lain, Laura Westby and Deanna Dyekman have been called by God to this ministry and to serve as the local board. Yet, before they received this call, they, along with their husbands were called by God to be parents; parents of some very intelligent, very energetic and very spiritual children. They sure light up my life when I see them. I thank God often that they and their children are a part of this church and my life. I feel this way about all the parents and children in our church. I am thankful that you all answered God's call to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and bear and raise the children he has given to you.

In the light of God's calling this team of women to parenthood and MOPS leadership , I wonder if they went through what Jeremiah did? Just a bit of background on Jeremiah might help here. As the parents of the children of our church are members of a religious community, so was Jeremiah. Jeremiah was part of a priestly family and was a cousin to the King, Josiah. King Josiah was a very devout follower of God. So Jeremiah from a very early age knew about God and Gods' ways, as many of our children do. Even with all the important knowledge of God Jeremiah had, he was surprised, and greatly taken aback when God broke the following news to him. "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." God had

predestined Jeremiah to one of the most important callings in the nation of Judah at that time. Jeremiah's response was most understandable: "I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.'" We do not know what age of boy he was, but his humble sense of inadequacy might be very familiar to us. God was calling him to be his voice of hope and discipline, his representative of salvation and condemnation to Jeremiah's own family, to the nation of his birth, Judah; and to its people who could be rebellious and downright mean at times. As God was asking Jeremiah to become God's father figure to his people, the thought, "You want me to do what, Lord?" was probably on Jeremiah's mind.

To the moms in the congregation, recall how you felt when the doctor first broke the news to you, "You are with child." To the fathers in the congregation, how did you take the news you were to be a dad? My wife, Holly, was 19 and I was 21 when we were informed that we were to be the parents of our yet unborn first child, Heidi. I remember being stunned and scared to death at the news God had called us to be parents. "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to parent, for I am barely an adult" were likely my words. Maybe many of you felt the same way and uttered similar expressions when first informed of a pregnancy. As a father and a grandfather, God's call to be a parent is the most overwhelming and rewarding commission I will ever have in my life.

Not only did God call Jessica, Stephanie, Deanna, Laura and Dallas to become parents, but he went on to commission them to lead the MOPS ministry in this church; and to reach out to other moms in the community to help them in raising their children in the Lord. The husbands of these moms, Clint, Steve, Esklid, Brad, and Jade are a vital part of this ministry, too—

ready or not. When God and Jessica called the other moms to do this thing for their children, and the children of other parents, their first thoughts might have been similar to those of Jeremiah: “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to do this. I have my own children to raise; my own career to carry; what will my husband say? Where will I find the time? Who will come to help us? You want me to do what, Lord?” The MOPS ministry has been and will continue to be an interesting journey working through the church system, lining up helpers, arranging food, finding funding and more. If God had come to me and said I want you to pick five young adult women in this church to lead the MOPS ministry, they would have been the five. But God called these women himself, and as a church we are most grateful they said, “Yes.” I pray that next week our offerings will be a powerful way that we might say, “Yes” to them and the ministry.

One more point on the call to Jeremiah and God’s call to us. God brooked no excuses. He basically gave Jeremiah the raspberries with his response. “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.’” As parents and as the leaders of MOPS, we know God rejected all of our excuses. I pray we all know that God does not call us and then abandon us. God is always with us to lead us and help us guide our children and the mothers of other children. Like Jeremiah so often did, let us call upon him for what we are to say to and do with our children.

What words might God have us say and what actions might God have us do with our children and the moms we are trying to reach in our

community? Paul's words in the hymn from I Corinthians 13 sum up the message very well-love. These words on love are most often heard on the context of a wedding. They were not originally written for weddings, but for a congregation in Corinth who forgot to practice the love of God that had been given to them in Jesus Christ. In their case, they let the gifts of the spirit become a division among them instead of a unifying power to do Christ's ministry. As parents, grandparents, leaders of MOPs and as Christians, God's words to us through Paul are that there is no more important or longer lasting gift, word or action than love, the love of God. No matter what else we say or do with our children or other moms in the community, if the love of God is not part of it, it is really nothing. If we teach our children good manners, give them the best of education, dress them in the finest of clothes, make sure they get on the best sports teams or dance troops, and leave them tons of money or land, but do not love them and teach them of God's love in word and deed, we have failed. To take it further into the world we are leaving to our children; if people as Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians and Independents, Environmentalist and Capitalists, Americans, Iranians, Taliban, Afghans, Christians, Muslims and Jews espouse all their principles, but have not the love of God, in the end, we all lose. If we want a win-win, we must love in word and deed.

God's word came through Paul telling us, "love is the most excellent way, and the greatest eternal gift. "Love is also patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." This love of which Paul speaks is a reflection of

the love of God seen in Jesus Christ. If we want to learn how this love has been lived in this world and learn how we are to live it, then we must look to God in Jesus Christ. I know that this is the direction in which our MOPS leaders want to guide the moms that come to their gathering, so that this love might also be passed on to their children and spouses.

Is it easy for us to live out this love on our own? Absolutely not. We must have God's love in us to come close to maturing to such a level of behavior. This love is much more than emotion. It is the power of this love from God that helps us to love when we do not feel like it. This love of God can guide us to overlook others faults and let us know when to call them out. It can help us realize when our faults have been overlooked and when we need to be called to task. This gift of love overcomes our fears that lead to hate. It can stop us when our ego begins to ruin our lives and the lives of others. It can redeem us when we have by human standards become unredeemable. It is there to help us love our children when they become unlovable. This love is not a pushover. It is also very tough when it has to be. The word "no" and the place called "time out" are also the love from God in action. We need God's help to say, "no." and time out," as acts of tough love.

To the moms and dads of young children, you will learn even more of this tough love when your children become teens. Just remember your teen years and wonder how your parents still loved you and let you live. In the 1800's, the writer and humorist, Mark Twain had a humorous insight concerning teenagers, especially teen age boys. "When a young man turns 13, put him in a pickle barrel and feed him through the hole. When he turns 15 plug the hole." Not much love there, but some humorous truth, speaking as one who was once a teenage boy and who helped to raise a teenage

son. When our son was between the ages of 13 and 15 was a time in which both my son and I learned that love was much more than an emotion or an easy thing to do on our own. In those dark days, I was often mightily tempted to “plug the hole” on my son. Fortunately, the love of God in Jesus intervened to stop me more than once. Jesus Christ reminded me to always love my son and let him know I loved him, even if I told him I hated and despised what he said and did. He has since matured greatly and lets me know how much this love means to him. It was also tough love we had to practice to save our daughter’s life when she was a teenager who decided she no longer wanted to have diabetes and stopped giving herself insulin shots. We had to put her in a hospital for five and half months to help her turn her life around. We never stopped going to see her or letting her know she was loved. One of the happiest days in my life was when she came home to us so we could love her even more. Even when she tragically took her own life at the age of thirty, she left a note of how much she loved us. As her family, we then learned a new meaning to “love never ends.” We also experienced how much we need the greatest gift of love from God to continue to live in this world, and love each other no matter what happens.

As parents we must tap into this love of God to sustain our lives and do the best we can to raise our children. Only God knows how they will turn out, but it will always be our responsibility to love them just as God has always loved us.

I have seen this kind of love in the women who are the leaders of MOPS as they have answered God’s call to begin and lead the MOPS ministry. You have heard Jesus’ message shared in the passage from Luke. He came to let his family and neighbors know that the call of God, and the love

of God were not to be kept in the village, but spread to even the despised Gentiles and the rest of the world. Sadly, his message made him most unpopular in his home town. Happily, you the MOPS have done what Jesus came to do and commanded us to do. As I expected, in contrast to Jesus' home town, the rest of this church family has joyfully supported their outreach efforts and will continue to do so. I think it is important that the congregation knows that Jessica Jessen believes in this outreach so much that often she travels fifty miles one way to sit in the Mall to tell other moms who gather there about MOPS. That is what the call and love of God and the outreach of Jesus are all about. This is what MOPS is about. May the everlasting love of God, the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the sustaining fellowship of the Holy Spirit guide the MOPS ministry and us as we support them.

Please turn in your Bibles to the Old Testament Lesson in Jeremiah 1: 4-10. We hear of God's call to Jeremiah at a young age. We might readily identify with Jeremiah's reaction to God's call as we read the passage.

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

5 "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."

6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

7 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.

8 Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."

9 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.

10 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." The Word of the Lord.

Please turn in your Bibles the Epistle lesson from I Corinthians 12:31-13:13. As I read the lesson, put your name in wherever the word love is mentioned.

31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

13 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. The Word of the Lord.

Please turn in your Bibles to the Gospel Lesson in Luke 4: 21-30. As we heard in the sermon last week, Jesus returned to his home town to preach the truth of God. Today we hear his sermon to them and their reaction to it.

21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 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?" 23 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.' " 24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 25 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; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 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. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way. The Word of the Lord.

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
January 31, 2010
Rev. Bob Garrard

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