

Psalms 71:1-6  
Hebrews 12:18-29  
Luke 13:10-17  
Jeremiah 1:4-10

## Knowing God is Knowing Self

4Now 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.” 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.”

For those who may not know it yet (and my apologies to those who have heard it too many times) my Theological Masters Thesis was based a lot on Joseph Campbell's idea on mythology. He wrote a lot of books and taught a lot of classes to expound upon the idea that basically, and this is my rough simplistic version of it – that throughout all of history and all the various cultures the Hero in all the stories have the basic similar traits – and that heroic adventure is a reflection of the human journey that each one of us needs to take to become fully ourselves – self actualized – to reach our full potential.

According to Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell described the Hero's journey as a life lived in self discovery and “the ultimate aim of the quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and the power to serve others. One of the many distinctions between the celebrity and the Hero is that one lives only for self while the other acts to redeem society.”

What we have here today as our scripture text is Jeremiah's calling into 'hero-hood'. It is a calling into maturity and responsibility – and it seems rare that those who really are aware of the daunting tasks feel that they are ready to take on the challenge. It is a sign of amazing awareness that Jeremiah sees that he is not really ready to do what is being asked of him. Because actually, no one really is.

When Jeremiah, like so many other stories in our faith history and in our fairy tales, first senses his calling he fights against it. He doesn't see himself as being mature enough to become that hero. And yet God persists, and shows him that he is worthy of this calling, and God continues to support him in this task. According to so many other spiritualists, psychologists and theologians, this pattern is so normal!

There are some examples in our collection of tales in which the prophet seems ready willing and able to take on the daunting tasks that await him or her, like Samuel and Ezekiel seem quite relaxed and accepting of the call – but some of the most profound of heroes seems to waffle at the idea. Moses claimed he was unskilled, Isaiah claimed that he was unworthy. Thomas R. Steagald write, “Protests of inadequacy, whether real or imagined, serve to reinforce a basic biblical and theological truth: the actual work of transformation is effected by God alone. God equips the called, in other words; God does not call the equipped . . . only the human who knows the impossibility of the task, who may even seek to flee the responsibility, can actually do it.”

What is important for us all to know is what God told Jeremiah – basically, we aren't ever going to be ready for the heroic adventure, because life is the adventure and we learn by doing. We can never be prepared for what lie ahead of us! The adventure can only be taken with the faith that God will be with us and God will give us the tools we need when we need them. Living a life striving to know all before we can possibly know it is a

lack of faith, it is impossible, it makes our lives miserable and shows a lack of trust in God who was with us from the beginning – who knows us thoroughly .

Many of us are familiar with this scripture, especially the part that says, “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.” This scripture should be a mantra for each and every one of us. God knew us from the first nanosecond that we were imagined. And regardless of how long our lives are we are part of God. God is part of us. We are part of each other. The all knowing character of God the fact that we were known before we were even conceived, strengthens our sense of self worth. And God knows we need it in the society in which we live which is designed in so many ways to make us feel inadequate. Without a sense of inadequacy what would we feel compelled to buy? And if we aren’t consuming where would our economy be? Because the financial situation of our world is far more important than our personal relationships . . . or is it?

The character George Bailey from the movie “It’s A Wonderful Life” shows humanity the importance of “being unknown” – by God or anyone. We got to see a glimpse of how his life truly affected the world around him, by seeing how it had changed when he was not known. We came to realize how precious and important he was in ways that no one could see. And don’t we all sometimes try to imagine what changes we may have brought about in this world if we weren’t known? We can’t see God but God sees us thoroughly and that gives us all hope that our lives may have more meaning than we give ourselves credit for.

Another very important aspect of Jeremiah’s calling, of the heroic adventure, and of our reaching our greatest potential in life is our willingness to seek God to “speak whatever [God] command[s] [us]”. The work that it takes to take the time to clarify – is this my will? Is it God’s truth? Are we running from a heroic adventure and clinging to a self absorbed life? Or are we striving for the life of a celebrity with little to offer the rest of the world.

We could get anxious about that as well, but once again, we have assurances from God. Bruce C. Birch wrote “. . . the emphasis is on the divine initiative and divine origin of the word one proclaims. God’s call almost always sends those who are called into contexts beyond their own comfortable experience.”

We have all been challenged and one point or another with awarenesses of human pain and frailty, with violence and injustice. Those moments of confrontation have enlightened us, given us strength and awareness, given us conviction to share what we have lived with others and for others.

Sally Brown, another theologian wrote, “The word that God sends into the world through Jeremiah is a disruptive word, because it is the word of the covenant-keeping God. Because the God whose word Jeremiah bears is specifically the covenant partner of the Jewish people, their God is emphatically NOT the on-call divine patron of whatever self-interested schemes, religious or political, the nation’s leaders may devise. Right worship matters . . . God’s commitment to right worship, self-giving, and care for society’s least has not changed; and God yearns over humanity with a love too profound to turn a blind eye to our self-absorption and self-deception, indifference or intolerance.”

It does seem like a frightening and terrible task, this calling that we can all relate to on some level. Be it the being known, be it the awareness of truth and the insecurity of accepting the calling to be a hero, but allow me to close this sermon with God’s assurance that the one who calls will also sustain us. Amen