

Sermon 2016 Epiphany 4, January 31, 2016
Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10 (17-19)
Theme: "Have I Got A Plan for You!"

Now, as the story of Jeremiah begins, Jeremiah is called by God as a youth. He's to be a prophet. In spite of the honor God bestows on Jeremiah by his calling, Jeremiah is reluctant to serve God. In fact, his first response is that he's too young and inexperienced. Jeremiah is afraid. He knows that his people are headed for judgment as a result of their disobedience to God's commands. In fact, that will be his message to them. And since his people persecuted previous unpopular prophets, Jeremiah fears the same for himself. But God will not be deterred; his plan has already been eons in the making. If you didn't learn it from Abraham, Job or David, learn it from Jeremiah, God will do what God will do and we have no say in the matter. We might be Americans, but God's kingdom is not a democracy and we don't have a vote.

Our comfort lies in the knowledge that God "knew" Jeremiah intimately from eternity. Before Jeremiah was conceived in his mother's womb, and even prior to the creation of the world, God already knew him and had a plan for him. God "consecrated" Jeremiah for his purposes and "appointed" him to be his "prophet to the nations" before his birth. Then God's plan continued to unfold when Jeremiah was conceived in his mother and while he was being formed in his mother's womb.

Then, when he was grown, God placed his own message on Jeremiah's lips. His message was one of judgment. The nation of Judah had

rejected God. Injustices abounded, the poor were neglected, and even human sacrifice was practiced. God's patience finally ran out, as it does for every unrepentant person. Judah would face destruction. This is the hard truth we all face. When we abandon God's Word, destruction follows every time. He is very patient but if we refuse to repent, that is, to turn away from our sinful paths, destruction will follow. I'm not talking about lightning bolts from the sky. I'm talking about natural consequences for our actions.

We all sin. We all make mistakes and God protects us from our own ignorance and stubbornness time and time again, but eventually he will stop intervening. How many times can a child show disrespect to his parents before they say, ok, live as you like but you're not living here anymore? How many times can a person live a promiscuous lifestyle before God stops intervening and they get an HIV positive diagnosis? How many times can someone drink and drive before God stops intervening and they die in crash or kill someone else? There is a difference between making a mistake and living a sinful lifestyle. We are no different from the people of Judah. God was patient with many mistakes, but eventually their sinful lifestyle got them exiled.

Jeremiah's calling has implications for every human life. It tells us that life is conceived in eternity by God before it is conceived within a mother's womb. In fact, the Lord's words to Jeremiah could have been spoken to every child: "I know the plans I have for you . . . to give you a

future and a hope.” Just as parents dream for their children long before they are even conceived, so God dreams for us. The only difference is that God’s dreams are not just dreams – they are plans.

But you and I both know that just because a parent dreams the dreams does not mean the child will receive the gift. We are stubborn, stiff-necked people. The world can be laid at our feet and we might very well step over it and go down our own inferior path just so we can say that we did it ourselves. However, parents are fallible human beings. We might dream dreams but our dreams are not always what is right for the child. God, however, is not fallible. God’s plans are exactly what is right for us.

God “knows” each of us from conception and has given each of us a soul. As David once confessed, “For you, O Lord, are my hope... Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother’s womb” (Ps 71:5–6).

By giving each of us a soul at conception, God has created an individual person with a specific destiny—a plan divinely “appointed” from eternity. Your life is not by chance. You, like Jeremiah, were planned by God. The circumstances of your birth are immaterial. Maybe you were the product of a drunken Saturday night in the backseat of a Chevy. Maybe you were the ill-conceived plan to save a disastrous marriage. It doesn’t matter. God planned you. God gave you a soul. God called you by name and you are his.

Eventually, Jeremiah did complete his calling by bringing a message of doom to his people. Yet, his work would still ultimately be “to give you a future and a hope.” That would be fulfilled by the prophet whom Jeremiah ultimately represented: Jesus. As Judah was eventually delivered from exile and returned to the Promised Land, so too will we be delivered from our exile of sin and returned to paradise where it all started.

We can be certain that God did not create us without purpose. He has plans for us and we can either rejoice in those plans, follow his Word and expectantly look for the fruition of his grace in our lives, or we can stubbornly go our own way which will result in trial and tragedy until we finally are beaten down enough to stop and turn around seeking God’s grace and forgiveness, or we will reject him altogether and spend eternity in Hell. The latter is not and never was his plan, but God, like every good parent, knows that his children have free will. He knows because he gave that to us as well. He has a plan for you. Listen to his Word. Receive his Sacraments and walk with the one who knows the plan.