

## Speak Out Sunday Commentaries on Jeremiah 1:4-10

### A Catholic Perspective

Jeremiah 1:5. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you;" Studies show us that after Jeremiah, it became an accepted idea that God himself forms the young child in its mother's womb. This means that God knows the human person and stands as unique master from the very first moment of a person's existence.

What a wondrous reality! God formed me and you and loves us, knows us from the moment of our creation.! We can rejoice in this and be glad. I want to focus on this because God's love is true of **each** person in our world. Each person is born of God and loved of God. This is the basis for our call to love in

### A Unitarian Universalist Perspective

(4) How does the word of the Lord come to you? Few in history have had an audience with the Divine, but most of us understand that the God of creation is still being revealed today. Perhaps the Lord speaks to us in the small still voice which tells us that we can begin the work of creating a more holy existence. When we allow the voices to be heard, we honor not only God, but the role of prophet each of us is given to play.

(5) All who share in the work of this living have, by the consecration of their birth, the obligations of the prophet. That is, each of us has the

### Jeremiah 1:4-10

**<sup>4</sup>Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,**

**<sup>5</sup>"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."**

**<sup>6</sup>Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."**

**<sup>7</sup>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,**

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

### A Presbyterian Perspective

**Analysis** (v. 4) The passage begins with Jeremiah reporting that God "came" to him. The Hebrew used implies a continued action—God was persistent and came to Jeremiah more than one time. (v.5) formed (*yashar*) a technical term meaning created, as the potter "formed" the pot out of clay. God created Jeremiah, as a vessel might be created, with a purpose in mind. (v.6-8) The phrase "I am only a boy." implies a lack (or perceived lack of power.) Jeremiah tries to decline the call but God insists; God will do the speaking, Jeremiah simply must open his mouth. The power will come from God. (v.9-10) God consecrates and commissions Jeremiah by touching his lips. His call is to pull down those things which did not lead to life and build up those that did.

**Application** "Today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." What terrifying words these must have been to Jeremiah.

### A Jewish Perspective

In the Jewish tradition, Jeremiah is addressing the People of Israel, reminding them of their destiny as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. Like so many biblical prophets, Jeremiah humbly resists God's call and assignment, believing himself to be unqualified and unworthy. God assures Jeremiah that he is indeed appointed by the Holy One, Who has given him the words to say. God's touch on Jeremiah's mouth is both holy and commanding, reassuring and anointing.

How can we use Jeremiah's experience to talk to victims of family

## A Catholic Perspective (continued)

I Cor. 13. This call is rooted therefore in the need to respect each person because God made them and loves them.

Respect is seen in persons who follow Jesus as disciples. Christians respect each person whether they seem worthy of it or not. It is difficult and requires self discipline and effort. Our nature tends to love ourselves first; our egos often get in the way.

Today is the Sunday when churches in the Knoxville area are invited to speak about domestic violence. The statistics about violence in our community are very large. The violent crime report for 2008 tells us that domestic violence made up nearly half of all the crimes against people. This means that homes are not safe places for many in our communities. Our children often live in fear which affects their sleep, their health, their ability to learn. Many women are prisoners in their own home.

## A Unitarian Universalist Perspective (continued)

responsibility to speak out against injustice wherever injustice is found.

(6) When the voice of conscience stirs in us and whispers to our ear, "it is time to raise your voice," too often our response is to tell why we cannot act or speak. We list our failings, our weaknesses, and attribute our strength to

another. In God's repeated invitation to prophethood, God is telling us that we do have the power. Inasmuch as God never leaves us, the power to defend and define ourselves is always with us.

(8) When we get beyond our fear, when we find ways to act in spite of our fears, we are embodying the urging from God to be all that we can be and to follow God's desire for a whole and healthy creation.

**<sup>9</sup>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.**

**<sup>10</sup>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."**

## A Jewish Perspective (cont.)

violence? When God says, "I knew you before you were born, and I made you holy," we can say that God knows us, and what we are made of, because God created us in God's own image. Even those who are beaten down have this divinity in them, which makes them worthy human beings; worthy of God's love and worthy to live safely and securely, with love and without fear. We can say, you have it within you to do what God wants you to do; to survive and to thrive. God knows you to the core of your being, and the core of your being is holy and precious. You can overthrow your oppressor, and plant and build a new life for yourself.

## A Presbyterian Perspective (continued)

When you are unsure of your ability to speak, when you feel you have no voice, how do you begin to fulfill a call to get rid of what is negative and life-draining, and build up what is positive and life-affirming? It requires a change of life, a change in perception of who you are, a realization that there is

something larger than you are that will provide the power and the words.

In the book "Speak", by Laurie Halse Anderson, Melinda is a high school freshman who has been outcast by her peers for calling the police to a "high school" party that she and some friends had attended during the previous summer. What she doesn't tell anyone is that she called the police to the party because she had been raped by a boy at the party. As the year goes along, she is silent, (and this is very effectively handled in the movie version by the fact that Melinda very rarely speaks) and becomes more and more withdrawn, carrying her secret alone.

## A Catholic Perspective (continued)

What is God calling us to do about this?

First: Examine our consciences on our respect for one another in **our** homes. Do I yell at members of my family? (verbal violence); Do I push or hit a member of my family when angry? (physical violence); Do I speak sarcastically or put a member down? (emotional violence); Do I damage their belonging? (emotional violence).

Second: Acknowledge my wrong doing, apologize and make amends.

Third: Practice one of the virtues listed in I Cor. 13. This chapter is beautiful but it takes a strong person to practice it. It is much easier to be resentful, to see my own way, to be envious and boastful.

Ending violence in myself and in my family is a strong, beautiful way to change our family and community. This is primary for a Christian. This will make a difference in our community. This can be done by children and adults: treating each person we meet with respect. All of us can learn about domestic violence. If a person trusts us with violence they are experiencing we can believe them

and give them appropriate support. This may include becoming knowledgeable about Domestic Violence; what it is, what people experience, where there are resources for help.

We know that prophets like Jeremiah and Jesus suffered because of their messages. People did not want to hear them. **We** often do not want to hear about domestic violence. We may think that it's none of my business; it's a family matter. But we are told today, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." Jer 1:8.

## A Presbyterian Perspective (continued)

By the end of the school year Melinda has healed enough to begin to speak. Through an art class she has worked through her self-doubt and realizes that she has to tell what happened to her—especially when her former best friend begins dating the boy who raped Melinda. She tells the other girl about the rape, which leads to a confrontation with the boy himself in which she breaks the silence with a scream, and holds the shard of glass up to his neck saying “I said no.”

Like many victims of family violence, Melinda feels complicit in her rape—because she was intoxicated when it happened and her “no” was not very

forceful—and this keeps her silent about the attack. She also felt alone, and in fact was alone until she began to speak about what had happened to her. Other victims are too small and weak, or lack resources, or feel otherwise responsible for what has happened to them, and so feel powerless in the face of the violence—especially if it is ongoing; the violent acts usually happen in “secret” as well, so no one outside of the situation knows what is happening.

This passage from Jeremiah can be a comfort to victims on several levels. First, it reminds us that God is with us and has a purpose for our lives—a positive, life-affirming purpose. Because God created us with a purpose, we have worth; our humanness comes to us from God and cannot be taken away by any human being. Second, it reminds us that even if we feel we have no power, since God is with us God will provide the power we need, to speak out about our situation. Family violence, when exposed, can be “plucked up and pulled down, destroyed and overthrown” and new life can be planted and built.