

CALLED, KNOWN, AND LOVED
Rev. Jason Santalucia

A sermon preached at Valley Presbyterian Church
in Brookfield, Connecticut
on August 24, 2025

Text: 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.”

Today we hear the story of Jeremiah’s call to be a prophet, and it’s easy to come away thinking this kind of thing only happens to people like him—great religious figures. But the fact is, we’re all called to serve God in some way. Every single one of us. It’s just that for most of us that doesn’t mean being appointed “a prophet to the nations.” It means something much more humble and down to earth. It means loving and caring for the people around us in small ways that don’t get a lot of fanfare.

A woman in one of my previous congregations, for example, used to bake a few loaves of bread every Saturday, and then after church on Sunday, she’d give them out to people she thought could use a little kindness—a family with a new baby, a friend who was feeling down, someone who was out of work. She didn’t make a big deal out of it. She just handed them the bread, smiled, and moved on.

That’s a calling.

Or the custodian at my wife’s elementary school. When he’s cleaning the building at night, he leaves little messages on the whiteboards for the students in the morning. Things like: You’re smart. I believe in you. You can do this. Only the teachers know it’s him. He doesn’t go around taking credit for it. He does it quietly, in the hope that some of those messages will be read by kids who need a little boost in their confidence.

That’s a calling, too. And I’m sure you have a million examples of your own. So don’t ever think you don’t have a call just because you’re not a famous prophet. Follow your heart, do what you think God wants you to do, and do it in a spirit of generosity and compassion and love. That’s all that really matters.

But what about the times when God does call us to do something big? What about the times when God puts some huge need in front of us. What about the times when God puts some crazy idea in our heads? It’s easy to say, “I can’t do that. I’m no Jeremiah. I don’t have the skills, the talents, the resources”—or whatever. But the fact is, God knows exactly who we are and what we’re capable of, and if there’s anything we need, God will be there to provide it. And we see that in Jeremiah’s own story.

God comes to him and says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; and before you were born I consecrated you.” So, calling Jeremiah to be a prophet isn’t something that just popped into God’s head one day. Jeremiah was literally made for this. But he doesn’t see it that way. “Ah, Lord God!” he says. “Truly I don’t know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” He’s just as insecure as we are. He thinks there’s no way he can do this. He’s too young. He doesn’t have enough experience. But God tells him. “Don’t 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.” It’s like, Who does this kid think he is, telling me what he can’t do? But then God takes a softer tone and says, “Don’t be afraid because I’m with you, and whatever happens, I’ll help you get through it.”

I don’t know about you, but I know how Jeremiah feels. When I was starting out in ministry, there were many, many times when I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I don’t know how to write a sermon. Truly I don’t know how to lead a worship service. Truly I don’t know how to run a session meeting.”

Even now, twenty years later, there are still times when I feel like I’m in over my head. The difference is, I’ve learned to believe in God when I don’t believe in myself. I’ve learned to relax, take a deep breath, and let God be God for me when I’m anxious and overwhelmed. And I’ve mostly learned that from watching other people.

We had a property manager at the church I served in Kentucky. His name was Kevin, and he and his wife, Debbie, were foster parents for many years. And they felt called to foster kids with serious physical challenges, in particular—partly because Debbie was a nurse, and she had the skills to provide the very specialized care those kids needed.

But still, even with Debbie’s training, this was a huge, scary thing for them to take on. There was not only the medical aspect of it, there was also the emotional aspect and the financial aspect. Most of the kids they fostered came from troubled homes and had a lot of issues; and although they got some assistance, Kevin and Debbie had to pay for a lot of things out-of-pocket.

So, they often felt anxious and overwhelmed, dealing with all that. But they learned to rely on each other. They learned to rely on family and friends. And most of all, they learned to rely on God. And God never let them down. Whenever they had a need, it would somehow be taken care of. Whenever they were frustrated, one of their kids would give them a hug or say thank you. And whenever they reached their breaking point, they’d find strength they didn’t know they had.

That’s one example, and again, I’m sure you have lots of your own. So, hang on to them, and if God calls you to do something big and scary, trust that God knows you better than you know

yourself, and don’t be afraid because you won’t be alone. God will be there with you.

So here’s what I want you to do. Pay attention this week to where you feel God nudging you in some direction. It might be something small—reaching out to a neighbor, listening to a coworker, offering encouragement to a friend. Or it might be something huge—taking on a new responsibility, speaking up for justice, stepping into a ministry you never imagined.

Whatever it is, remember Jeremiah. Remember that woman who used to bake bread for people at church. Remember the custodian at my wife’s elementary school. Remember Kevin and Debbie. And remember your own stories—the people in your life who were called, known, and loved. Then relax, take a deep breath, and do what your heart is telling you to do.

Let’s close with a prayer:

Gracious God,
you call prophets and you call ordinary people.
You ask some of us to do great things,
you ask some of us to do small things,
and you ask all of us to serve you with love.

Give us ears to hear your call,
hearts ready to respond,
and courage to say yes,
whether the task is simple or overwhelming.

When we doubt ourselves,
remind us that you see us as we truly are.
When we feel unworthy,
remind us that you equip us with what we need.
And when the road is difficult,
remind us that you walk beside us
every step of the way.

We offer ourselves today—
our words, our actions, our love—
for the building of your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.