

Jeremiah 1:4-10
February 3, 2019 – 4th SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Christ's Love Gives Us Everything

- ☆ for life (vv.4-5)
- ☆ for courage (vv.6-8)
- ☆ for purpose (vv.9-10)

Dear teammates of the Champion:

Anyone talking football today? Some worship the sport despite the First Commandment: ***“You shall have no other gods.”*** But it doesn't have to be that way. Sports can be a great pastime, a diversion from drudgery. Harmless entertainment for emotional investment without risk. Unless you play.

Let's say college football. You're not that big or fast, strong or smart, so you're a lineman – no offense fellow head crunchers. One day in practice coach has you running a play that pulls the offensive tackle down the line behind the center to nail that linebacker who keeps blitzing on the other side. Unfortunately, you miss the linebacker the first time, so Coach runs the play again...and again...and again. Teammates are asking why, so Coach says, “I wanna see you get him.” But that linebacker is smarter and faster, and now he knows you're coming. Why keep running this play? Why play sports?

So many life lessons. Today the Holy Spirit's playbook: **Christ's Love Gives Us Everything...**

☆ for life (vv.4-5)

Most days everyone walks off the field. But spiritual battles for God's ancient prophets meant life and death for time and eternity. The kings mentioned in previous verses include the last good King Josiah. Josiah died in battle; Judah mourned. His sons and grandson quickly brought the kingdom to an end in the Babylonian siege and destruction of Jerusalem, followed by 70 years of Babylonian Captivity. It was Jeremiah's **life**-assignment to preach to a dead and dying audience of citizens and royalty. Why?

Is Jeremiah just “the weeping prophet”? His book too depressing? Then you'd miss one of the greatest comforts of all time and so timely for today. God is the Author of life. God the Creator forms every baby in the womb. One woman in Shoreview said she did not believe in God until she held her first baby in her arms and thought, “This is a miracle!” So true, but that's not all. It's a miracle that God knows each of us by name before we exist. Jeremiah reports: ***“The word of the LORD came to me. ⁵Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I set you apart.”***¹

Throughout this most ancient Book of Books, the Holy Bible, God has been saying for centuries than you are not an accident. In the most intimate of ancient hymns called Psalms, King David was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to write: ***“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*** (Psalm 139:13–16 NIV84) In Baptism, God puts His Name on us to make us His own, His own family responsibility to guide and bless. Father, Son and Holy Spirit set us apart for **life** with God. In Jeremiah's case, that **life** would be difficult, but still so vital for all of us today. God said: ***“I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations.”***

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>). NPH, © 2017. Order: 800-662-6022.

☆ for courage (vv.6-8)

There's a team assignment that Jeremiah did not want. Are you surprised? Haven't you heard that for most people public speaking is a fear worse than death? A *prophet* would have to speak. A *prophet to the nations* would have to speak to non-Jews, *i.e.*, Gentiles, who were not even from the chosen nation of Israel. Would it surprise you to hear that practically all the ancient prophets of God objected like this. None of them jumped at the chance to serve the holy God. They knew folks would be angry at what they were commanded to say. Especially Jeremiah's message was doom and gloom for Israel: *No matter how hard you fight, God says you will lose!* He was blasted as a traitor whom officials tried to kill.

Such a message requires **courage** first for correction. Jeremiah complains, *"Ah, LORD God! I really do not know how to speak! I am only a child!"* Sounds like Moses at the burning bush: *"O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue....Please send someone else."* (Exodus 4:10,13 NIV84) God was upset with Moses.

Likewise, the LORD corrects Jeremiah: *"The LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone to whom I send you and say whatever I command you."* How frustrating it must be for the LORD that we're so ready to talk sports or gossip with most anyone for hours. Politics can really get some folks cranked up, but do we care to speak for God who gave us a mouth? Do we listen to others with our two ears? Not everything is pleasant. Conspiracies against Jeremiah would come.

And yet here after correction comes God's command and promise, a one-two punch that destroys cowardice and sets up a champion: *"Do not be afraid of them, because I am with you, and I will rescue you, declares the LORD."* That should sound familiar. Jesus gave a soul-saving playbook to the first team of Twelve Apostles: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore while going disciple all the ethnic groups by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to guard as treasure all things as many as I have commanded you. And look! I am with you all the days to the gathered goal of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20 TPA) Why do we play under this Champion Coach? With the gift of **courage, Christ's Love Gives Us Everything...**

☆ for purpose (vv.9-10)

Don't worry about downloading files or finding an old CD player. God can upload His whole **purpose** for the prophet with the touch of His hand: *"Then the LORD stretched out his hand and touched my mouth. The LORD said to me: There! I have now placed my words in your mouth.^{SEP:11} Look, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."* Sounds like a plan, but I'm not so sure I like it. That play again, Coach?

God is also giving you the job of speaking for Him. *"You are my witnesses"* (Isaiah 43:10), God keeps saying to His people. Can't we talk about happy things? Prosperity, winning, overcoming obstacles? Inspiring championships? Our sports authorities like to forget all about the losers in the Super Bowl. They're the best in the world. It took so much to get here. But winner takes all. Giving all the kids a ribbon doesn't make them care to compete. What's the **purpose** of church, really?

If no one ever got sick, would you need a doctor? If cars never broke down, what's a mechanic? Many preachers keep insisting that everyone is going to heaven anyway. They say there is no hell. Some conclude their friends will be there, so why worry? Ah, dear ones! Apparently, God was so worried about us that from eternity He planned to send His only Son to suffer and die for you by name, to save you from hell. Sin seems so harmless until you see that it took the innocent blood of Jesus to cleanse away sin's guilt. We all need *uprooting, tearing down, destroying and overthrowing* to warn us as Jesus did about that place of *"weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Luke 13:28). Under the pile of players who can breath? Christ always comes over to pick you up. He gives us His prophetic **purpose to build and to plant**. Peace in Christ alone is God's **purpose** for you. Come and see. There's so much more to the game of life than meets the eye. And eternal life is where God wants you with Him. Jesus help! Amen.

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