

**“Being Called” by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 12040822**  
**Jeremiah 1:4-10 and Luke 13:10-17**  
**Elon Community Church, 22 August, 2004**

Somewhere in the land of Judah, a young man by the name of Jeremiah heard the voice of God calling to him. We can't be quite sure how God called the boy. We know it was not by telephone or public address system. Perhaps it was in a dream or during a time of meditation and prayer. Whatever the circumstances, Jeremiah heard God calling to him to be prophet: a spokesperson for God.

Was Jeremiah excited to hear from God? In a word, no! I don't know how many times I've had someone ask me, “Why doesn't God speak to me?” or, “Why won't God let me know what choice I should make?” The scriptural record indicates that people don't really want to hear from God, because it usually means that they are about to face a very difficult ordeal. Moses gave three excuses for not having to face Pharaoh. Jonah set out for sea instead of walking to Nineveh. Isaiah claimed he had unclean lips and therefore wasn't worthy to speak to his people.

God spoke to Jeremiah, saying that God had appointed him to be a prophet to the nations. Jeremiah responded to God by saying, “Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” Jeremiah resisted God's call. He gave an excuse about why he couldn't do what God asked. A good indication that God has called is that God asks us to do something we would rather not. For Jeremiah, the ordeal was to speak to the nations.

It is difficult to hear the call of God in our lives because of the noise of the world around us. Advertisements and TV shows hold before us the images of elaborate mansions and fast cars. Those are hard to acquire as a minister, school teacher, chaplain, social worker, or missionary. Friends, bosses, family members and yes, the church call out, each requesting a piece of us. We might feel as though we have nothing left to give in God's service, and wouldn't it be more fun to go to a Carolina or Duke or Elon game?

Because of all of this noise around us, it requires effort and strong will to take fifteen minutes, sit in a quiet place where we won't be disturbed, read the scriptures or an inspirational piece, and turn our thoughts to God.

Our God is usually a gentle and inviting God. God usually doesn't interfere with our lives by shouting and yelling over the din around us. It is up to us to go to a quiet place in the house and mind and invite God in. Sometimes, yes, God does knock us up the side of the head as with a two-by-four to get our attention. A disturbing accident, a bed-confining illness, or a deep loss may lead us to stop and consider the priorities of our lives. But still, it is by invitation rather than by force.

Perhaps God is calling you to something special a new mode of service—to ministry or teaching, or chaplaincy. Bill and Mary Ruth heard God's call to work as Partners in Service following their retirement. They went first the Menaul School in Albuquerque and now they are volunteering at Blowing Rock. Perhaps the call comes through a person: a teacher, or minister, or friend, or from someone in need. The call may come repeatedly through the mouths of many people, through readings, through a camp or retreat experience, or through the evening news, perhaps. It nags at us.

We have an opportunity to respond or not respond. When we do respond to the call, we may finally discover peace. Young Jeremiah received the reassurance from God that he would not be alone. God would be with him. Furthermore, God would put the right words into Jeremiah's

mouth. God reassured Jeremiah that neither his lack of speech nor his age would hinder him from fulfilling God's call. God will accompany us to wherever God is calling us, and God will give us ears to hear and the right words to speak.

The prophetic call for Jeremiah was to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow. That does not sound peaceful, but sometimes, in order to build up, things have to be destroyed first. A few months back we needed a new compressor for the HVAC system. Biff Brafford and Jim Starr first had to wrestle the old one out to make room for the new one. If an alcoholic or drug addict wants to really kick the habit, he or she must get rid of the old friendships, the ones that have enabled and encouraged the destructive behavior. The former addict then has the room in his or her life to pursue new friends who will be supportive of new addiction-free patterns.

Sometimes in our personal lives, we need to sweep away some of the old patterns, habits, and activities to make room for new ones. Lack of energy and participation are sure signs that something might need to be swept away to assure that new life can take shape.

God may not be calling you to anything spectacular. For the most part, we are called to simple things. God calls us into a deeper relationship with God. God calls us to deeper relationships with others—our family members, fellow workers, and neighbors. God calls us to share a word of grace to those who are hurting or lonely. God might be calling you to be involved in a Sunday school class as a teacher or learner. God might be calling you to develop a new outreach project, or to simply be a care giver in your daily occupation. God may be speaking your name, calling to you to help make this Elon Church community a community of healing where people can rest in God's presence.

The scripture from Luke tells the story of Jesus' healing a crippled woman who had been bent over for eighteen years. It was on a Sabbath, and it was illegal to perform healing on that day. Jesus chose mercy over piety and healing over legalism. He called the woman over and touched her and healed her. And that's why Jesus was crucified: He continually chose mercy over piety and healing over legalism.

There is an irony in that old piety. What is the Sabbath for? It is a day to devote to God. We look upon the Sabbath as the perfect day for healing. It is God's day. God is a God of healing.

Perhaps you have been carrying a heavy load of burdens that causes you to bend over under its weight. You are crippled and sore. Jesus calls out to you to touch you and heal you. Perhaps we can assist in others' healing by listening and caring.

A church community is vitally important as we listen for God's call, as we help others heal, and as we deepen our spirituality. Howard Rice has written,

A sense of God's presence does not just happen for most people. Cultivation of an openness to God is necessary to enable most people to pay attention. Some days it seems that every person engaged in the pilgrimage may feel as if he or she is going backward. Doubts do not disappear easily, and prayer is hard. For this reason, the spiritual life cannot be a do-it-yourself project. Each of us needs companions along the way to offer their help when we cannot help ourselves. We need people who will hold us in prayer when we cannot pray, people whose faith will sustain us in our doubts."<sup>1</sup>

Is that not a perfect description of the church? We are here to listen, to care, to hold one another in prayer. We are here to sustain each other during our time of doubt. Thank God for the church: the body of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>Howard Rice, *The Pastor as Spiritual Guide* ©1998, Nashville, TN, Upper Room Books, p. 48