

SERMON — ST. ANDREW'S, KITCHENER — AUGUST 24, 2025

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 13:10-17

(Baptism at 10:00 AM)

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you," from our first reading (Jer 1:5). Perfect words, coincidentally (or more than coincidentally), for a day of baptism. Words of comfort, encouragement, and commissioning — which we all need, in one way or another, whether living in our own day, or 2500 years ago.

Jeremiah will have an important role among his people, and a lasting impact in our human history; he's one of the "major" prophets of Judaism. As our one Eucharistic Prayer reminds us, *"Through Moses [God] led [his] people from bondage into freedom; through the prophets you renewed your promise of salvation."* Like God, from the burning bush told Moses *"go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt,"* this later prophet is instructed *"you shall go to all whom I send you."* And one of the recurring assurances of scripture, culminating in the angel's message to Mary, the prophet here is told: *"Do not be afraid... for I am with you."*

All of this saying something, not just to Jeremiah, but to all of us [especially, today, to Ebube and Olivia] that *"if God is for us, who [can be] against us?"* It doesn't mean that everything's going to be "sunshine and lollipops." The Book of Jeremiah is known for being heavy in its message and its lamentations. Jeremiah had a difficult life. But from what we have heard today, he followed where he was led, and he had meaning and purpose — as we all do — that is implicit. Not earned or randomly found, but it's always there, in all of us, by virtue of being created and called by God who says *"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.... do not be afraid."* Jeremiah was sent to his, and to other nations. We are sent to 'wherever and whoever' in our own lives, to — in our own particular way — as I think I described it a few months ago, to "hold an icon of Jesus" up over our heads. Our liturgies end on an intentional note, with particular wording, about being sent out into the world: *"Go forth in the name of Christ... Go in peace to love and serve the Lord... Go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit."* (We will... with God's help.)

The spiritual director who put that image in my head is the same person who said to me that God can even use, not just our *uniqueness*, but even our *imperfections* as we seek to love God and love our neighbours. Everything, even our human limitation and woundedness, can be offered up in love, remembering that our faith holds that the resurrected, though still scarred, body of Jesus ascended to the right hand of God. And that's what can change everything. (It already has, we trust, in faith.)

It might be helpful to return to that image of holding up our hands over our head, but think not just of holding up an icon of Christ for others to see, but first, holding up our hands, and offering ourselves (and souls and bodies) to God. To ascend, in a sense, though for now, by faith in our hearts. (Which is the second thing I say at the start of the Eucharistic Prayer, when you think about it. And in baptism, we're doing something similarly, too, by faith: following Jesus in his death, and into his resurrection.) Offer up yourself, even in your fear, imperfection, or brokenness, to God. This connects with what we heard in that reading: "before you were born I consecrated you."

"Consecrate" is a somewhat fancy word; a 'religious' word. Whether on the internet or with a big book, if you find what's called a concordance, you can look up all the different verses in which "consecrate" shows up in the Bible. With God promising to lead the wandering Hebrew people through the desert, they're instructed to consecrate the tent where they believe God 's presence specially resides. And they consecrate the altar. And they consecrate Aaron and his kids that are called to be a special community of priests: people who particularly help make the connection between God and our world real. The Book of Leviticus describes Moses using oil to anoint Aaron's head, to consecrate him. (And we will anoint the heads of Ebube and Olivia shortly, too.) Later on the people are commanded: "Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty..." The year of Jubilee, a time of hitting reset on society, so that things can get back to a fair balance. (And there's lots of other examples.)

"Consecrate," that fancy, religious word, has something to do then, with making something holy. (Or, as our reading nudges us to understand, sometimes holiness is already there; it's about noticing it, rather than achieving it. "*Before you were [even] born, I consecrated you.*") Consecrating has something to do with setting one or more things apart — whether objects or people — for a special

purpose. "Sanctify" is a similar sort of word, having to do with "sacred," with "holiness," with "saints." And that appears in some of our Eucharistic Prayers, too: that we be "sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

The gift of this reading, the gift of today, is to be reminded that we are all created, called, consecrated by God, to respond to God in our own particular way, in the context of the world God made, and in the context of the church that has Jesus as its head. Ebube, Olivia, and each of us, share that creation, calling, and consecration. In some one-time ways, like baptism. In some frequent, repeatable ways, like communion. And underneath all that, God's reminder: "*before you were born, I consecrated you.*" We all share in this work, as God's Church, of being set apart for the special purpose of holding up, and taking our icons of Jesus out into the world. And oftentimes finding that Jesus is already out there, in our God-created world: in the beauty, and also in the suffering; in the crucified. For those drawn to song and poetry, the words of a famous hymn might help us remember what all this means [including what baptism means]:

Take my life and let it be

consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days

let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move

at the impulse of thy love.

And all of this, understanding, "I will, with God's help."

[10:00 AM HYMN #38]