“We Are Called”

Jeremiah 1:4-10

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He is perhaps the unlikeliest of saints.

Vincent, or Vinnie, as he is known to his friends, is a rather colorful character.

He smokes. He drinks. He fraternizes with a “lady of the night.”

He gets into bar fights and has an addiction to gambling at the race track.

Vincent is not exactly saintly on the exterior.

He’s pretty rough around the edges and most people don’t like him.

Which is fine because he doesn’t like most people.

His community of friends is quite small.

But the movie that Vincent is the star of is called St. Vincent.

Bill Murray plays this leading character.

I think this is perhaps my favorite role he’s played since Phil in Groundhog’s Day.

Murray has this witty way of portraying the curmudgeon.

The cranky guy who no one really understands.

But in his recent film, St. Vincent, you see that gruff exterior unravel as you learn more of his story.

This is helped by a boy named Oliver who moves in next door to Vincent.

Oliver’s parents have recently divorced, so he and his mom move out of the house.

She works long hours and does her best to make sure Oliver is okay, but soon realizes she’s going to need help.

Vincent steps in and offers to help – for a reasonable babysitting fee.

No chance of him watching the neighbor boy out of the goodness of his heart.

Oliver and Vincent teach each other many things.

Vincent teaches Oliver to toughen up.

Oliver teaches Vincent to soften up.

When Oliver is given a school assignment to research a real life saint, he chooses Vincent.

His teacher defines a saint as someone whose life is celebrated for the sacrifices they’ve made.

A saint is someone who makes the world a better place.

Other classmates choose Mother Theresa types, but Oliver chooses Vincent.

He sees a different side in Vincent that most people don’t see.

He sees Vincent caring for his wife who has Alzheimer’s disease.

She lives in the finest facility with the best of care, at a great cost to Vincent.

Oliver learns that Vincent was a sergeant major who served in the war with Vietnam.

He was highly decorated for his service and bravery.

Oliver also sees how Vincent cares for the underdog.

This little boy is bullied at school, but Vincent teaches him how to be brave and even how to befriend his enemies.

When Oliver shares the real story behind Vincent, the world sees that he is indeed saint material.

What I love about this film, is how it reminds us that some of the most unlikely characters are called to the most important roles.

Grumpy old Vincent is called to be a devoted husband to his wife who doesn’t recognize him.

He was called to be a war hero.

He is called to be a mentor to a lost little boy.

The most unlikely of characters are called to be saints.

Teachers,

preachers,

prophets.

This is true of Jeremiah as well.

In our text this morning we hear his call story.

That very moment when God calls out to him, inviting him to a higher calling.

God says: “Look, Jeremiah, you’re special. I’ve consecrated you for the work of a prophet. I’m going to speak through you to deliver very important messages to the nation. Sound good?”

“Um, no. No that doesn’t sound good!” Jeremiah responds.

With fear and inadequacy, Jeremiah tells God that he wouldn’t make a good prophet.

He points out his age – just a boy, likely younger than 10 years old.

He claims he does not know how to speak.

This excuse sounds similar to the one Moses used when God called him centuries before.

Being a preacher’s kid, Jeremiah likely knows a bit about what God is calling him to.

That language of plucking up and pulling down, destroying and overthrowing, building and planting.

Jeremiah knows what that’s about.

He knows this is the calling to a difficult ministry.

One of bringing bad news to the people God, warning them about disaster, war, dislocation.

Jeremiah is going to have to tell his own people about these things, but he’s also going to have a larger audience beyond his nation.

Jeremiah knows the people won’t take this news lightly.

They will threaten him, hate him, beat him for this word he is to bring them.

This unlikely prophet isn’t exactly thrilled about the work God is calling him to.

Can we really blame Jeremiah for resisting this call from God?

We might find ourselves relating to Jeremiah.

How often do we resist the task God calls us to?

How often do we make excuses, telling God all of the ways in which we are ill-equipped for the task?

How often do we ponder the consequences of God’s call and decide we’re just not up for it.

It sounds too hard, or too scary. We find other things to do.

Maybe we don’t even allow ourselves to hear God’s call.

We silence God’s voice, force it away.

Refuse to listen to what God has to tell us.

Like Jeremiah, we just don’t want to go there.

We’d rather slip comfortably into our routine.

We’d rather stick to what we’re familiar with, what we know.

But here’s the kicker:

God has a way of calling us even when we resist, even when we try to plug our ears so that we can’t hear it.

We are called by God to particular tasks despite our inadequacies.

We are called to face the dangerous unknown.

For Jeremiah, God didn’t give much weight to his excuses.

God knew better.

God reminds Jeremiah that even before he was formed in his mother’s womb, God knew him and loved him.

God consecrated Jeremiah before he was even born.

Before Jeremiah entered this world, God had a special plan, a call for his life.

God told Jeremiah not to worry, God would give him the words to speak.

God would protect him from harm as he delivered those frightening messages to the people.

Even though Jeremiah’s call was a scary one, God was with him through it all.

Throughout the Bible we see examples just like Jeremiah, of an unlikely candidate being called to incredible work.

Sarah thought should couldn’t have children, yet God birthed the nations through her.

Moses had a speech impediment yet God spoke through him.

Jonah was terrified of confronting the Ninevites, yet God gave him the confidence.

Jesus was just a boy from Nazareth, yet God would turn him into the King who would save the world.

God has a way of working through those unlikely characters, to make great things happen.

God doesn’t usually call the most qualified, or most confident person to a task.

The same goes for each one of us.

God places a claim on us before we are even born.

God formulates a plan, a call for what we are to be and do.

As much as we may think we’re not equipped for the call, we have to remember that God doesn’t call the equipped.

God equips the called.

God will give the words, the skills, the strength, necessary to respond to whatever that call may be.

It might caring for a neighbor, grandchild, or aging parent.

It might be volunteering in the local school or teaching at the community center.

It might be stepping up as a leader in the church or telling someone about God’s love.

Whatever it is that God calls us to, God promises to give us what we need and promises to be with us through it all.

We simply have to be open to that call and trust that God will guide us.

We can’t dwell on what we have now, we have to open our imaginations to what God is able to give.

God will equip us for whatever we’re called to.

As St Vincent, the curmudgeon, reminds us, God calls some of the most unlikely candidates to the most incredible work of caring for others and showing them God’s love.