

**"But I'm Only..." – Jeremiah 1:4-10 – August 21 2016**

**Rev. Rachel A. Wann**

Starting back in the mid 90's there was television series called "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." It ran for seven seasons. Buffy the Vampire Slayer was a show about a super hero. We know super heroes – Superman, Batman, Spider Man – and for the most part they tend to be men. This series wanted to create something different. They wanted to have super hero that was not only a woman, but a young woman. This super hero was known as the Slayer, and she had the powers of super strength, fast reflexes, and the ability to heal quickly. Like any super hero, her foes were comprised of the forces of evil, in her case - vampires, demons, zombies, and all sorts of scary creatures that come out during the night.

Now every superhero has a backstory. The mythology behind the slayer is that there could only be one slayer at any given time, but once that a slayer was defeated and killed in battle, a new one would be called to take her place. Each slayer is guided by an adult known as a Watcher. The watcher trains her and prepares her for her calling. When Buffy was first approached by her Watcher at her high school, she was stunned and refused to accept her calling.

As you might have guessed from her name, Buffy was sort of a Valley Girl type high school student in southern California. She was popular, pretty, a cheerleader, and homecoming queen. Her biggest worries in life were fashion, hair, make-up, and which member of the football team would ask her to the prom. The idea of slaying vampires and other monsters seemed a complete joke to her.

There is a scene early on where Buffy is confronted by her Watcher who is trying to convince her about who she really is. Buffy is about to go off to cheerleading practice when the Watcher appears, and he attempts to instill within her a sense of duty. He talks about her destiny as the Slayer, how she is gifted, called and chosen. But Buffy's not interested. She retorts, "Don't you get it, I don't WANT to be chosen!" In an effort to prove to her that she really is the Slayer, whether she likes it or not, the Watcher throws a knife at her, knowing her innate reflexes will allow her to deflect it.

Understandably upset by this demonstration, Buffy hauls back and punches him in the nose. She gasps at her reaction and exclaims, "I've never hit anyone before!" The Watcher, holding his nose, blood streaming down his face, praises her, "And you did it very well." Buffy is confused as she contemplates what just happened and what it might mean for her future. The scene ends with her shocked admission, "And I didn't even break a nail."

Buffy was a rather unlikely hero, rather shocked by her calling. Our friend Jeremiah was not much different when God first approached him. Life during Jeremiah's time was pretty rough for the Jews. The northern and southern kingdoms had been under the foreign rule of the Assyrians, and there existed plenty of political, social and religious unrest. The people were living in turbulent times and it probably seemed to them like God didn't care about their struggles. They were lost and bewildered

by their situation. God's chosen people, ruled by foreign nations? What had gone wrong? The time was ripe for a new prophet to come on the scene. A prophet to share God's word with the people.

Jeremiah was young, more than likely a teenager, and he was descended from a priestly line out of the tribe of Benjamin. He was probably already trained in priestly duties, ready to carry on the family traditions of serving. And then he received his calling. The call story in the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah is similar in form and structure to many call stories throughout the Bible. Compare it with the calling of Moses or Isaiah, or the twelve disciples of Jesus or even young Mary, who was told by an angel that she was to bear a son who would be the Messiah.

Generally, God or a messenger of God, shows up and proclaims to the callee that they're about to embark on a serious mission. The initial reaction of the callee is one of shock and disbelief. Excuses begin to roll off the tongue. Isaiah was worried about his sinfulness, and Moses was concerned because he stuttered. Jeremiah was no different. He had his own excuse. "Hey, I'm just a kid. No one is going to listen to me."

That's the funny thing about God. When God calls someone, it's generally someone you would not expect, someone who doesn't stand out in a crowd. God never seems to want the hotshot or the overachiever. No, God chooses people who aren't puffed up by their own importance or consumed by their own sense of self-worth. And why is that? Because those types of people tend to rely on their own strength. Pride gets in the way of the message. The notion that God picked me because I deserve it begins to drown out their need for reliance upon God. When God picks just regular people, they know they have to rely upon God to do what they are being called to do.

When Jeremiah shares his concern that he is only a boy and is not able to speak, God allays his fears. God acknowledges Jeremiah's fear. The task seems daunting, and honestly, not very appealing. Who in their right mind would want to be called to be God's prophet in such of time of turmoil in Israel's history. The situation was pretty bad, and Jeremiah knew that he would have a difficult job. And so God promised to be with him, to guide him, and to give him the words to speak. God's strength would carry him through.

Now you might wonder, what does this call story have to do with the rest of us. I mean, after all, God isn't showing up in people's bedrooms calling them to be prophets, spreading gloom and doom to all the people around them. Isn't God's call kind of a special thing, reserved for certain people? Pastors talk about being called into the ministry, but does this idea of calling impact anyone else?

I'd like to go back to my earlier story about Buffy the Vampire Slayer. All throughout her exploits fighting evil monsters, she was alone. Sure, she had friends who helped her out, but in the end, she was the one and only slayer, the chosen one, called to a unique destiny. And the moment, the very moment she died, another young girl would be called to be the next slayer.

In the final season of the TV show, Buffy had to face her worst foe yet. It was a horribly evil entity who wanted to completely destroy the line of the slayer. You see, even though Buffy was the one and only slayer, there were all these girls all over the world who had within them the potential to become the next slayer. So this monster wanted to kill every single one of those girls, those potential slayers, so there could never be another slayer. And without a slayer on earth, evil could run free.

Tired of being the one and only chosen, Buffy came up with the idea to share her power with every potential slayer on earth. She reasoned, if all these girls had it within them to be the next chosen one, why not give them the chance? She figured out how to make it happen, and in the series finale, all the potential slayers around the world received Buffy's power. They all became slayers, fully realizing the potential that had been there all along.

Each one of us has the potential to fulfill our God-given calling. Each one of us has been called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Well, the simple answer is that we are all called to follow Jesus Christ - to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We know that. But what does that look like? That answer is a bit harder. Because that's something that each one of us has to figure out for ourselves.

God probably won't show up in your bathroom some morning as you're getting ready for the day and tell you what to do. Generally, how we interpret our calling happens through more subtle encounters with God. Sometimes we feel ourselves pulled into a specific occupation. Or maybe we're drawn to become advocates for a particular group of people – helping those who are homeless, speaking out for the rights of minorities, offering our specialized services for free to those who can't afford it, becoming a regular volunteer at an assisted living facility, or visiting folks in prison.

Maybe we feel ourselves called to a specific job within the church – handling the finances, or serving on the building committee, teaching the children - but oftentimes we're called to minister beyond the walls of the church. Perhaps we're simply called to use our skills and talents to the best of our abilities – being the best parents to our kids, caring for all the stray animals in the neighborhood, having a pleasant disposition that brightens the lives of all whom we meet.

Each one of us has within us the potential for God to use us in a special way – a way that is unique to our interests and talents, but may oftentimes draw us beyond our zones of comfort. When that happens, we may be tempted to hold back. We fear facing the unknown. Or like Jeremiah, we don't think we're good enough. Remember, when God calls us to do something, we don't have to rely on our own strength to get it done. God promises to be there right alongside us. The challenge for us then is, listening closely enough to God, so that we understand what that call is, and then putting it into action.