Have you ever been to places where you feel unwelcomed before? Whether you’re moving into a new neighborhood, immigrating from another country, starting a new job or a new school, or even walking into a new church, these experiences could sometimes be daunting that makes someone feel unwelcome or they do not feel that they belong.

In the passages that we just read, we came across two prophets (Jeremiah and Jesus) who also found themselves not quite “fitting in” or being rejected by the people. Being a prophet was not the most glamorous job, not many people wanted to sign up for it. Being a prophet was often unappreciated and unwelcomed especially when you have to deliver a message that the people do not want to hear. The prophets’ role was to be the messengers between God and God’s people. They were NOT there to be crowd pleasers or to tell them only what they want to hear. They were there to deliver a message of hope for the people.

In our Old Testament passage, we came across the young prophet Jeremiah who was given an ambitious charge to “***pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant****.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* Jeremiah was chosen to bringing changes and new hope to the people. However, he could not do it single-handedly. Jeremiah needed his constituents to work alongside with him. They must be on the same page, share a common vision and engage in the same mission together.

Unfortunately, the young Jeremiah did not receive the level of support that he was looking for. When Jeremiah had something to say, hardly anyone paid any attention. They just ignored him and kept on going about their business. The people kept on committing their lives doomed by their worldly sinfulness and their relationship with God kept drifting further and further away. However, in the eyes of God, Jeremiah was a successful failure because of his obedience and faithfulness.

Jeremiah’s message to the people was a very simple one, “repent and turn to God, or else God’s judgement will come.” Even still, the people didn’t get it. Before Jeremiah was born in his mother’s womb, Jeremiah was consecrated to be a prophet among the nations.[[2]](#footnote-2) As God laid his hand upon his mouth, God declared that Jeremiah shall go where God would send him, speak what God would command of him to speak. *“Do not be afraid of them” says the LORD, “for I am with you to deliver you."[[3]](#footnote-3)*

God reassured the young Jeremiah that he would never be alone, in spite of his youthfulness, even though Jeremiah had repeatedly attempted to resist God’s calling…much like other notable prophets like Jonah, Isaiah, and even Moses, just to name a few. Why me God? Why me? Why can’t it be somebody else? Or we brush God aside saying not now God, I’m still too young. I can’t take on these huge responsibilities. I don’t have time for all of this. *How often have we used these same excuses to resist God’s calling in our lives?*  I know that I have. We have a tendency to put God on our “Call Waiting” or the “Do NOT Call” list by closing the door when we hear God is knocking on the other side!

In the same way, as we read in our New Testament lesson today, Jesus also found himself standing amidst the synagogue. He stood up, rolled up the scroll and began reading from Isaiah, ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."[[4]](#footnote-4)***

This was a homecoming event for Jesus, coming back to his hometown Nazareth after he had launched his publish ministry. You would expect the whole town would show up and everybody would be cheering you on and rallying behind you in a non-hostile environment. Well, that was pretty much the case for Jesus until he asked them to examine their hearts and confess their sins, that they must change the ways that they have been doing things. Wait a minute, not so fast! The crowd became enraged. Not only did they want him out of town, they even wanted to push him off the cliff and kill him.

In the eyes of the religious leaders, Jesus was a blasphemous troublemaker. He had been under their radar for quite some time, because Jesus was seen as a threat to their authority over the people. **Jesus proclaimed a message of liberation was not for Himself but for those who have been oppressed and marginalized.** Jesus came to preach a message to good news to the poor, proclaimed freedom to the captives, recovered the sight of the blind, and released the oppressed.[[5]](#footnote-5) His mission focused upon God’s Kingdom in heaven, and not upon our human standard or worldly circumstances.

Come to think of it, **how often have WE shooed Jesus out of town, taken Him OFF our invitation list, un-friended Him on Facebook, un-invited Him in our homes or even in God’s house?** **How often has Jesus been knocking at the doors of our hearts and we’ve refused to let him in?** What if Jesus were to come knocking at our doors, as someone who is marginalized, living on the edge, or as migrants and refugees who are seeking a new life and an opportunity to fulfill their dreams? Do we still turn them away and reject them like we have, among our unwelcomed prophets? Whenever we do that, we in essence are rolling out the door mat that says, ***“Jesus, You are NOT welcome here!”***

Furthermore, **God has called us not only to listen to the prophetic voice among us but to BE that prophetic voice and to live prophetic lives in our communities.**

As part of the initiative adopted by the most recently General Assembly of the *Presbyterian Church (USA)* last year, our denomination has been challenged to engage our missional focus surrounded by God’s envisioned kin-dom as outlined in Matthew 25. Collectively the church seeks to become more missionally focused, not only to proclaim God’s message of hope and love, but to bear witness and deliver God’s compassion, peace and justice in our world, wherever God may be sending us forward.

As Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 25, concerning the Kingdom of God, he said *“for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'[[6]](#footnote-6)*

Even though Jesus was rejected by his own people, he was not discouraged by the greater mission that his Father had set apart for him. When He was not being welcomed, Jesus simply passed them by and went on His way,[[7]](#footnote-7) shaking off the dust of His sandals and moving on to the next town.[[8]](#footnote-8)

God has called us to be “prophets” and “prophetesses” of our time, in order to bear witness to the radical gospel of Christ through our faithful obedience in this world.[[9]](#footnote-9) We must, therefore, live up to our own individual and collective calling by becoming the transformative agents of God’s grace through the lives of others.

What message is God challenging us to hear and actions to take on today? What concrete and measurable steps are WE willing to take on when it comes to the various issues of our time and concerns of our community? **How do our gifts and passions meet the needs of our world today?** How may we bear witness to the message of “hope” and “welcome” amongst the strangers, just as the woman whom I mentioned earlier, who took it upon herself to rent out local hotel rooms for the homeless off the streets of Chicago in the dangerously cold sub-zero temperature earlier this week? Her random act of kindness and generosity inspired others to collectively do the same during a desperate situation of a matter of life and death.

**This is all part of God’s calling and ultimate challenge for us today…as we keep our eyes and our hearts opened, in looking out for the needs of others before ourselves.** By the virtue of our baptism, ALL of us have been commissioned to proclaim the good news of the Lord’s favor as the welcomed prophets.

**Friends, we are living in a desperate time that requires desperate measures of God’s compassion, love, and justice in this world.** Each one of us have been called to be that prophetic voice to lead others back to where they belong. Let us roll out God’s welcome mat and not welcome Christ back into our lives, but we also invite others along as well. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Jeremiah 1:10* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Jeremiah 1:4-5* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Jeremiah 1:7-9* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Luke 4:18* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Luke 4:18* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Matthew 25:35-36, 40* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Luke 4:30* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Mark 6:11* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. David, James Calvin Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 1, P.290 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)