

Imagine being commissioned from before your birth to speak "the word of the Lord"! That would certainly give direction and purpose to one's life - even though no one is aware of it. Imagine hearing, just as you were beginning to figure out your life's purpose and goal; imagine hearing a voice speak to you with a distinct commission to become the mouth of God to your people.

Jeremiah pled youthful inability. Probably most of us would too. Yet Jeremiah had been educated in the religious practice of his time. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. There had been rivalry between the tribes of Benjamin and David over religious practices. In addition, Judah was in a mess. People were looking for positive direction and purpose. Jeremiah was called to address the turmoil of his time; to restore his people to faithful life as God's people in that place.

Jesus was a practicing Jew. It was his custom to worship at the synagogue on the Sabbath. Often he was called on to teach. Jesus understood that he too had been sent to speak God's word to the people. When a crippled woman entered Jesus seized the opportunity to demonstrate God's mercy and power. He called her to him and spoke to her: "Woman you are set free from your ailment." (Remember: illness, injury, and lameness were considered signs of judgment for sins.)

Jesus touched the woman. Immediately she was able to stand straight and move easily! She praised God.

The order of the synagogue was disrupted. The leader of the synagogue was disturbed. Jesus had broken the law! The people thought it was just wonderful. Immediately the leader chastised Jesus for working on the Sabbath. [One commentator suggests that this was indeed appropriate work of a rabbi on the Sabbath.] The leader of the synagogue saw this as a teaching moment and opportunity to maintain his authority. He proceeded to review the Law about work and Sabbath keeping.

Jesus countered, beating him at his own game. He pointed out the Law allowed even the leaders of the synagogue to perform necessary daily tasks on the Sabbath such as watering their animals.

Luke is very clever here. He uses the same words - loose and bind - to describe caring for the animals as Jesus used in describing loosing the women from the crippling condition that bound her. Surely freeing this woman to live life fully praising God was appropriate Sabbath work.

Jesus is speaking about reverence for the Law that had become a system used to control, to bind up the people. It no longer freed them to discover and do God's will.

People of faith though out the ages have been called - in spite of their age and limitations - to speak for God in this world. Our call is always to provide the environment for God to **break in** to our world to clarify or renew God's will. When we speak about doing church in a new way that is what we are talking about: developing openness to hear and consider new possibilities for outreach and mission;  
different ways of serving that fit the energy and ability of the present congregation;  
becoming more in touch with the neighborhood as partners in development.

It is challenging. We begin to think of our excuses. We consult our busy calendars. Hear again the words to Jeremiah: "Do not be afraid..., for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord."

God does not abandon us when we step out in faith. God empowers us. God will deliver us through the tasks and responsibilities we undertake. God will even give us words to speak to particular situations that will amaze us.

May we seek healing of the inhibitions and traits that limit our ability to act. May we be empowered to see the possibility of God's breaking in to our community and our lives in new ways. May we discover the courage and energy and enthusiasm to rely on God's leading as we continue the faith journey of this congregation; and give glory to God.

Amen