

## Accepting your calling

### Sermon on Jeremiah 20, 7-11



***Z** You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived ; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. **8** Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. **9** But if I say, "I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. **10** I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Denounce him! Let's denounce him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him." **11** But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.*

The word "profession" can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, it refers to the job one has chosen to earn a living. Secondly, the word "profession" also contains the word "calling." This means that it's not just about earning money, but also about pursuing an activity that has a deeper meaning and for which one possesses special gifts—a task to which God has also called us.

How satisfied are you with your profession?

In earlier times, a person's profession was often predetermined. People took over their parents' profession, as a kind of inheritance, so to speak. The children of a cobbler usually also became cobblers.

Today, people have much greater freedom in choosing their profession. And yet, it's astonishing that many aren't truly happy with their profession. Only a few see it as a special calling given to them by God.

Today we meet a man who was absolutely certain he was in the right profession – and yet became deeply unhappy with it. Had he had the choice, he would never have accepted it. If it had been possible, he might even have filed a lawsuit in an employment tribunal. Because from beginning to end, his profession brought him nothing but suffering. We're talking about the prophet Jeremiah. Even when God first called him, Jeremiah politely declined. He felt too young for the task. Later, as the burden of his profession grew ever heavier, he wrestled with God. His words sound almost blasphemous: He accuses God of having seduced him – like a young girl who was then abandoned. Or he describes how God's power overwhelms and crushes him.

Three things impress me about Jeremiah.

- First, I'm impressed by Jeremiah's honesty. He opens his heart wide like no other and reveals his despair and hopelessness to us.
- Second, that despite all his complaining, he still holds fast to God and his calling.
- Third, Jeremiah is a great comfort to us – a role model in accepting a calling that we don't actually like.

Let's first look into the heart of Jeremiah, which he reveals to us: We see that he stood alone as an individual – even his closest relatives had abandoned him. Jeremiah not only

had to fight against the sins of the people, but also repeatedly embarrassed himself through seemingly embarrassing actions. For example, he had to step before the entire crowd and smash a flowerpot. But that wasn't all. While the people were still staring in horror at the broken pot, he had to proclaim:

"Just like this flowerpot, the people of Israel will be shattered."

And this at a time when everyone else was euphorically happy that things would only get better and better all the time. It was perfectly clear that the people would never accept this message. They must have seen Jeremiah as an unbearable spoilsport. And yet he had to carry out this task. Because God wanted to show through this drastic message that the people were on the wrong path. The Israelites considered themselves politically ambitious and believed their misdeeds would go unpunished. In reality, however, they had served other gods and turned away from God. But why didn't God simply tell them that himself instead of sending Jeremia in this intricate fashion? Why didn't he make short work of the people and destroy them? Instead, Jeremiah had to be publicly pilloried—as he had so often before. As he smashed the flowerpot and spoke these words, he could already see the bystanders' lips forming horrified "ohs" and their eyes rolling up in annoyance. Then came the angry cries:

**We'll get you...! You have no right to live for saying such things!"**

Jeremiah was then placed in a block, his body painfully twisted and stretched. The guard repeatedly called out to him: "Will you finally stop spreading such bad news? Just look at your colleagues! They live in luxury. And why? Because they're not as stupid as you and they're proclaiming a halfway pleasant message from God!"

As always in such moments, others joined in to laugh and mock Jeremiah loudly – even his own family. But Jeremiah didn't put on a brave face. He was radically honest when he cried out to God:

**"I'm at the end of my rope. I can't go on. And I don't want to go on."**

What remains impressive, despite all his complaining, is that Jeremiah always holds fast to his faith in God. Especially in times of crisis, it becomes clear that Jeremiah doesn't just believe in God as a stopgap or a little crutch for difficult times. His faith stems from a deep realization: God is truly there. This God speaks to him. And this God has given him a clear mission. The false prophets, on the other hand, had nothing to do with God. They didn't believe in him themselves. Instead, they used religion as a political tool for their own benefit. They always told rulers and people only what they wanted to hear. But their word wasn't God's word—it was a horrific distortion of it. It served only to lull people's consciences so they could continue to rebel against God and his commandments unhindered. A so-called "word of God" that doesn't take the living God into account is a terrible distortion and leads to ruin. God's word is different. It reveals people's hearts. And often this revelation means a confrontation with human depravity— and this provokes by its very nature contradiction.

What the prophet Jeremiah clearly shows us is that God's message is in stark contradiction to the world. Wherever God appears, contradiction arises. This is self-evident and is emphasized repeatedly in the Bible. Jeremiah is a harbinger of Jesus in his calling, which Jesus fulfills uncompromisingly and uncomplainingly.. Jesus, too, accepted the cup of suffering without shying away from it. He, too, trembled and wrestled with his fate, to the limits of his strength. "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinners," he says. And this Jesus promises us that we will suffer a similar fate if we follow him. Contradiction with the world is inevitable. Today, we see that many people from the Islamic world are experiencing exactly what Jeremiah once experienced: They are despised, mocked, and even killed by their closest family members because they believe

in Jesus. We bear—as Paul says—the sign of the cross and therefore we often have to endure the hatred of the world.

Jeremiah was the only one who stood between the living God and the abyss of his people's corruption. And yet, he held unwaveringly to his faith. Precisely because he reveals his heart to us, he is a comfort to us. For we, too, are not always satisfied or completely happy with our profession. But with faith in God, I can understand my profession not as fate, but as a call from God. And if we understand "profession" in a broader sense, even a difficult fate can be a calling from God.

For example, there is someone with a serious illness. Of course, they suffer from it. Of course, they long for nothing more than healing and pray for it. But if this healing doesn't come, they can still recognize a call from God in this suffering. Even then—even if they argue with God, complaining, and crying out. A couple going through a serious crisis can feel similar. If the situation doesn't change, it may be that this crisis, despite all the contradictions, is understood and accepted as a call from God.

As Christians, we have a special calling: We are called to spread the love of God to all people. And in doing so, we can find ourselves just like Jeremiah:

"What, me? I don't even know what to say!" And I have no arguments against all the opposition that arises when I speak of Jesus!"

Jeremiah shows us, however, that we don't have to be superheroes. We may not have convincing arguments. We may even have to endure the ridicule of others. And yet, we carry within us the same faith in God that Jeremiah already had. In such moments, I look to Jesus. Jesus took a different path than Jeremiah. Yes, he too complained, he too suffered. He too was despondent and at the end of his strength. And yet he accepted the cup of suffering. Willingly and without protest.

He walked the path of obedience—to death—even death on the cross.

And even in the deepest suffering, he showed us that he saw the broad horizon of the resurrection in the midst of darkness.

*But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. Amen*