

Today I Appoint You

Text

Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

– Jeremiah 1:9-10

Suggested Hymns

CW #546, #572

Theme & Parts

"Today I appoint you"

1. The Lord selects his servants
2. The Lord equips them for service
3. The Lord directs their serving

Introduction

It is the rare person who does not feel at least some initial hesitation when called upon to do special work in the Church. And, in a way, this is a proper feeling. For there is no work on earth more important and responsible than, in some way, to serve the Savior and His Church. In fact, just the responsibility of being a disciple of Christ in an unbelieving world is already enough to overwhelm us, whether we are called upon to serve in some official capacity or not.

So the thought of taking up such service full-time, as a servant in the public Gospel ministry, may be a daunting prospect. Know that it is so far for the prophet Jeremiah and is, likewise, for all who consider such work. The courage, the confidence, and the capability to serve the Savior in a sinful world cannot be found within ourselves. It must come from the Lord, the One who says to his servants: **TODAY I APPOINT YOU.**

His words to Jeremiah remind us that they do, as our text shows us that:

1. The Lord selects his servants
2. The Lord equips them for service
3. The Lord directs their serving

The Lord selects his servants

"The Lord reached out his hand and touched (Jeremiah's) mouth..." This act symbolized what God had already said to Jeremiah in v.5: *"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*

The Lord selected Jeremiah to be his inspired spokesman, a prophet who would speak and record God's word and proclaim it to God's people. That he would do this was God's decision, not Jeremiah's.

Today I Appoint You

Jeremiah did not choose to serve God. As a sinner, he could not and would never have made such a choice.

But God chose Jeremiah, first to be his child – forgiven and saved by God's free grace – and then to be his servant – to declare God's forgiveness and salvation to others.

In much the same way, our Lord has laid His hand on each of us. He has known us and loved us from eternity. He has put his love into action by giving his Son to redeem us. He has called us by the gospel to be His children by faith and has adopted us as members of his family in Holy Baptism.

With the privilege of family membership and an eternal inheritance comes responsibility: namely, to live to God's glory and bear witness to His grace. God has made us *"...a chosen people, ...a people belonging to God, that (we) may declare the praises of him who has called (us) out of darkness into his wonderful light."* (1 Peter 2:9)

While our God calls us all to serve him, Scripture makes it clear that the Lord selects some of his people for a special sort of service – public Gospel service – to do the work of preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, to feed Christ's lambs and shepherd his sheep, to be his witness in the name of his church throughout this land and around the world.

As he moved Jeremiah, the Lord likewise moves young people to prepare for such service. HE works through our Wisconsin synod to train those young people in schools of ministerial education. Then he calls them, through the assignment committees and calling boards of the Church, to serve him in the public Gospel ministry.

Every bit as much as in Jeremiah's day, the Lord today selects His servants. And when he does so, he does not leave them to their own devices.

The Lord equips them for service

It was to give his prophet boldness and confidence to serve that the Lord told Jeremiah: *"Now I have put my words in your mouth."* Jeremiah had objected (v6): *"I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."* Though he wasn't really so under-age, Jeremiah felt that his youth and inexperience would be a disadvantage in speaking to the old and wise and powerful. But the Lord provided Jeremiah with something not all the human wisdom and experience in the world could equal. He gave Jeremiah his word.

The LORD equips each of us with that same powerful and versatile tool – his holy Word. None of us is inspired as Jeremiah was; but the words of Jeremiah and the other holy writers are in our hearts and in our mouths.

When the devil, this world, and our own sinful flesh seek to fill us with hesitation and doubt in our service to our Lord, we have the precious promises of God's Word to silence our doubts and fears, and to overthrow our objections and misgivings. When our own weaknesses hold us back from doing what we can, we have the Word's power to motivate and to empower us in serving our Savior.

Today I Appoint You

What the Lord provides to all his servants, he offers in abundance to those whom He calls to the public ministry. He supplies them with the prime equipment: His Word. And does not send them without preparing them – through his church – to understand His Word and communicate it.

He takes a person's character, gifts, abilities, temperament, – even weakness – and finds the right time and place to put them to work. He does not demand that his ministers be heroes or geniuses, but he equips and expects them to be his faithful servants. He says to each of them as he said to Jeremiah: *"I have put my words in your mouth..."* – the words of the Holy Scriptures which can pierce the heart, which can divide the soul and spirit, which are useful to reprove, instruct, correct, and rebuke, which alone make wise unto salvation, and which thoroughly outfit Christians for their service to Christ.

Those the Lord selects as his servants he equips for service. And that they might know where, when, and how he would have them serve, the Lord likewise directs their serving.

The Lord directs their serving

The Lord made clear the role he intened for Jeremiah. God appointed the prophet to be his agent, his emissary, his representative who would speak for God to the people of the earth. The words the Lord would give to Jeremiah would be heard in the house of Israel, but ultimately it was also the nations and kingdoms of the world who would hear God's Word as it was set down and proclaimed by Jeremiah.

The purpose of that Word for all it would reach was to root out the sinner's smugness, pull down his pride, to destroy his conceit, and throw down his idols. But also it was to build and to plant by proclaiming God's mercy and announcing his salvation.

The role and responsibility God gave to his prophet Jeremiah was ultimately carried out far more perfectly and completely by the Great Prophet, Christ Jesus, himself. Jesus is the true Lord of the nations, the King of kings, with all things under His feet. His holiness judges all humankind. His Law roots out sinful self-righteousness like noxious weeds, pulling down pious pretense, destroying all manmade religious systems, overthrowing the strongholds of man's best moral theories and efforts.

Then, by the Gospel, he graciously plants new life and builds up his Church. This on-going work of Law and Gospel Christ has commisioned His Church to do in his name. Taking the lead in doing that precious work are those the Lord calls to serve him in the public ministry.

What sort of service does the LORD have in mind for you? You are redeemed to serve your Redeemer. That is your work on earth, regardless of the occupation you may choose. Perhaps Jesus intends to appoint you to serve him publicly as a pastor or teacher, a staff inister or missionary. This is nothing to fear, but rather something highly to be desired, as Paul wrote to young Timpthy, he who sets his heart on such service *"desires a noble task."*

Is the Savior appointing such service for you? For our son, for your daughter? This is something to think about, to pray about, and to place faithfully into the hands of the Lord.

Today I Appoint You

Do so with confidence, for when the Lord says “I appoint you” he also pledges that he will guide you and he will direct you in the way that best brings you blessing, in the way that most gives him glory.

Amen.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you have chosen us from eternity, bought us with a great price, called us to live under you in your kingdom, and commissioned us to serve you. Let us never be timid or hesitant in our service. Let us never selfishly refuse to do anything you ask us to do. You have given us your Word to equip us as witnesses to your mercy. To this day you have generously supplied us with faithful pastors and teachers to instruct us and lead us on the way to heaven. We ask you to move the hearts of more young men and women to dig deeply into your Word and prepare themselves to communicate it to others. Make them willing to preach and teach your Law and Gospel without fear or favor, without reserve or reluctance. Touch their lips, put your Word in their mouths, and give success to their efforts. We ask it for your name's sake and for the eternal welfare of many souls.

Amen.

Parents, Lead Your Children to Kingdom Work

Text

When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him to the LORD, and he will live there always." "Do what seems best to you," Elkanah, her husband told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him. After he was weaned she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the boy to Eli, and she said to him, "As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshipped the Lord there.

– 1 Samuel 1:21-28

Suggested Hymns

CW #506, #515

Theme & Parts

Parents, Lead Your Children to Kingdom Work

1. Because they are gifts from the Lord
2. Because the Lord has work for them to do

Introduction

"The Lord wishes to speak to you today about a very special way of serving him – what we call the 'public Gospel ministry.'" Normally we would expect such words to be addressed to the young men and women in our congregation, those who still have their lives and what they will choose to do with them lying before them. Today's message, however, focuses attention instead on those who are best able to influence and encourage and support and guide these young people. We speak, of course, about parents. (If you aren't a parent, you are definitely not left out of the picture here, for God provides us each with opportunities to offer the sort of support and encouragement we are talking about. But there is no denying that the spotlight today will fall mainly on mothers and fathers.)

"But why?" you might ask. "I can't make up my child's mind for him. And I certainly don't want to force my son or daughter to be something that he or she does not want to be." That's just fine! But we cannot overlook the facts – for example, four out of every five seniors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, students in their final year of preparation for the parish ministry, indicate that the strongest influence on their decision to pursue that work was *their parents*.

Parents, Lead Your Children to Kingdom Work

Parents, especially Christian parents, are a tremendous influence in their children's lives and their planning for the future. So, mothers and fathers, this Sunday, through this portion of Holy Scripture, the Lord addresses you. He speaks about a parent like you and, through her, he urges: Parents, lead your children to kingdom work.

1. Because they are gifts from the Lord
2. Because the Lord has work for them to do

Because they are gifts from the Lord

Hannah had a special reason to cherish her son, Samuel. The odds were against Hannah having a child. She had been barren for many years. This was a source of great despair for Hannah. Elkanah's second wife, Peninnah, mocked her. Eli, the priest, misunderstood her sorrow. Elkanah could only pity her. Worst of all, barrenness endangered the continuation of a man's family in Israel and, therefore, was viewed as a great curse for, if a family line ceased it could no longer have a part in keeping of God's promise of a Savior through the people of Israel.

So when the Lord finally gave Samuel to Hannah, there was no question in her mind as to where he came from. *"I prayed for this child,"* Hannah said, *"and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him."* (v27). The Lord has graciously heard Hannah's plea. She would respond in grateful worship and in putting the Lord's gift to work for him.

Giving Samuel into the Lord's service was part of Hannah's worship. Along with the sacrifices she brought to the temple at Shiloh, she gave her son to thank the Lord for His goodness. Leaving Samuel at Shiloh was a direct response to the Lord's answering Hannah's prayer.

Application: Certainly our situation is different in many ways from that of Hannah. She seems to have made Samuel's mind up for him. And he began his service at a surprisingly young age. But Hannah does teach us an important principle: Giving the best of our time and material goods is not the only way of praising the Lord for all the goodness, both temporal and eternal, which he has showered upon us. This act is also a confession: "My child is a precious gift of God; therefore, I wish to lead him to the most important work there is to do."

As usual, however, God's purposes go far beyond the obvious. He didn't give Samuel to Hannah just in answer to her prayer. He also had work for Hannah's son to do. Likewise, we can learn to lead our children to kingdom work.

Because the Lord has work for them to do

Hannah already in our text had some idea of what Samuel would do at Shiloh. She tells Elkanah, *"...he will live there always."* (v22), implying that service around the sanctuary would occupy Samuel's future. This chapter also closes with a statement, *"And he worshipped the Lord there,"* which indicates that Samuel led a life of devotion and service to the Lord.

Parents, Lead Your Children to Kingdom Work

But this was only the very tip of the things which the Lord had planned for Samuel. The priesthood of Israel was a disgrace (2:12-17). After judgment fell on Eli's house, Samuel would stand before the Lord and offer sacrifices for God's people (7:9). There was no person fit to be the Lord's prophet to proclaim both judgment and deliverance to the people (3:1). So the Lord used Samuel (3:19-21). A strong God-fearing leader was lacking to deliver Israel from its enemies and to lead the nation in times of peace. Again the Lord turned to Samuel (cf. chapter 7, esp. v. 15).

Samuel was a servant in every sense of the word. He used the word of God, his confidence in the Lord's faithfulness, and his own exemplary life to serve his God. And the Lord used Samuel as his prophet, priest, and king to bring his chosen people back from a time of terrible backsliding.

Application: The Lord gave Samuel to Hannah because the Lord had work for him to do. God has work in his kingdom for our children also. They are not going to be the prophet, priest, and king of God's people. They don't have to be. Jesus Christ has taken care of all that. He has revealed the truth of forgiveness and eternal life. Our children need only proclaim it. He has been both priest and sacrifice, offering himself on the cross for all the world's sins. Our children need only point sinners to him. He has established God's kingdom of salvation and truth. Our children need only feed the members of that kingdom with the Lord's living word.

But the work needs to be done. The darkness of sinful ignorance and the lustful joy of living in direct opposition to God's holy Word and will threatens to engulf our nation and our world. Despair, hopelessness, and a frightening lack of spiritual direction are found everywhere, at times even in the visible Christian Church. Oh, the Lord has plenty of work for our children to do. Will we be like Hannah and encourage our children to prepare themselves to do that work?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we cheerfully acknowledge that all of our blessings come from your gracious hand. That includes the precious blessings of our children. Help us to see that in our role as Christian parents you have given us great influence in our children's lives. As we already have led our children to their Savior through baptism and your Word, encourage us to lead them also, if it is your will, to full time service in the kingdom of your Son. And teach all the church to recognize the sacrifices of Christian parents who do lead their children to kingdom work. May we show that we value those sacrifices as you do, by supporting them with our prayers, our offerings, and our avid interest in the work of ministerial education. Bless the schools that train our future public ministers. Bless the church in which they will serve. May they all remain true to your Word and your work, that the end result of all our efforts may be many more souls brought to know you and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. In his precious name we pray. Amen.

Jesus Still Calls to Us: Feed My Lambs, Feed My Sheep

Text

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said this to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

– John 9:4

Suggested Hymns

CW #436, #545

Theme & Parts

Jesus Still Calls To Us: "Feed My Lambs, Feed My Sheep"

1. It is a call which is most undeserved
2. It is a call which fulfills a need

Introduction

"The Bible doesn't apply to me anymore." Isn't this the opinion of many people in our world today? "It is such an old book. Anything which was completed nearly 2000 years ago cannot have much to say to me today. After all, the world is so much different from what it was back in Jesus' day."

There is a grain of truth in that statement, isn't there? The world is very different from Jesus' day. (Here a short list of the most obvious ways in which mankind has advanced in the last 2000 years could be included.)

But there are some things which never change. Every single human being on this earth still stands condemned before God as a sinner. In all that he is and everything that he does he falls far short of the mark of perfection which a holy God demands from his creatures. Every single human being still needs to know that Jesus Christ is his personal Savior who shed his blood on the cross and rose victorious on Easter morning in order that he, the guilty sinner, might live with God eternally. The flock of Christ still lives in this world. And every member of that flock still needs to be reminded of his sin, comforted and strengthened by the Gospel, and encouraged to live a life full of the fruits of faith.

Since all of this is true, Jesus' words in our text, spoken so many years ago to the Apostle Peter, still are applicable today. Today our Lord is still concerned that his flock be cared for with his word. And so we can confidently say based on these words which passed between Jesus and his disciple: Jesus still calls to us: Feed my sheep, feed my lambs.

1. It is a call which is most undeserved
2. It is a call which fulfills a need

Jesus Still Calls to Us: Feed My Lambs, Feed My Sheep

It is a call which is most undeserved

Don't you have to be amazed at Jesus' course of action here? It is surprising enough that the risen Lord, who would soon ascend into heaven once and for all, would entrust the care and expansion of his kingdom into the hands of men. It seems to us that the Savior himself or at least his angels could do a much better job. However, if he felt his disciples could do the job, why come to a man like Peter? This is the same man who only a short time earlier had deserted this Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Under the questioning of a lowly maid and others in the courtyard of the high priest he denied ever knowing Jesus, backing the denial up with cursing and swearing. Nobody could be more undeserving to serve the Lord.

But Jesus does come to Peter. First of all the Lord reinstates Peter as his disciple. That was the purpose of the three identical questions. As he had denied his Lord three times, Peter was now to openly confess his love for the Lord three times. With that confession Peter also was admitting how inconsistent with love for Christ and devotion to his cause his denial had been. Confessing his sin hurt Peter deeply. Confessing sin is never easy. Especially so for Peter since, with it, he confessed to his own unworthiness to serve Jesus.

But Peter himself would be quick to remind us that he also confessed his faith with his answer. The Lord, with his Word, had created a living trust in Peter's heart which could confidently say, "Lord, you know all things. Look into my heart and see a love for you which flows from faith in you as my Savior." Peter as much as said, "I may have forfeited any right to be called your disciple or to serve you, but I believe that you have washed me clean through your sacrifice on the cross." If we imagine that Peter believed anything else, we need only read the word he wrote in his first epistle, "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed*" (1 Peter 2:24). From such a living faith flowed Peter's love for his Lord.

Jesus saw this love. And, undeserving through Peter may have been, Jesus returned him to discipleship and called him to full-time service in his kingdom.

Application: If Jesus still is going to use human beings to carry on the work of his kingdom, and he is, then who is able, or who is worthy to do so great a service to the Lord? Of course, the answer to that question is that none of us is worthy to serve. By our sins we, too, have denied the Lord in so many ways. But the blood of Jesus Christ has washed us clean. We, too, are not able to serve in a way that does justice to the Lord, but in his grace God has filled our hearts with a love for him. We admit that the call of Christ to serve in the preaching and teaching ministry of his work is the one which nobody is worthy to fill. But if Satan can convince us that, for that reason, we should not answer the call, he has won a great victory. Jesus still calls you and me, undeserving though we may be. And he desires that we answer that call the way Peter did.

Jesus did not call Peter just for his own sake, in order to restore Peter to discipleship. Christ also called Peter for the sake of kingdom work. So although Jesus' call was clearly most undeserved, it was also:

Jesus Still Calls to Us: Feed My Lambs, Feed My Sheep

A call which fulfilled a need

The Lord who said to Peter, *"Feed my lambs,"* was the same Lord who had said earlier in his ministry, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom God belongs to such as these"* (Mark 10:14). The Lord commissioned Peter to serve in his kingdom because he wanted little children to continue to know their Savior after he ascended.

Jesus has a real desire to make every man, woman, and child in this world a member of his flock. Therefore, he told his disciples, *"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd"* (John 10:16). He knew the urgency of this mission, so he said, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out..."* (Luke 10:2). All these things are included in what Jesus meant when he told Peter, *"Feed my sheep."*

Jesus was very concerned that his people continue to be fed and led by his Word after he had withdrawn his visible presence from this world. That is why he prayed in the upper room on the night of his betrayal, when he certainly had other things on his mind, *"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you"* (John 17:20). So dear to the heart of the Good Shepherd is every member of his flock. And so he told Peter a second time, *"Feed my sheep."*

Application: The need is still there, and our Savior and Shepherd is still concerned about it. He wants the children of today fed, not just with food for their bodies, but with the food of his Word. He wants the Good News of the world's salvation through his blood announced to everybody for whom he gained it, and that means every person everywhere. He is just as concerned as he ever was that the sheep of his flock continue to be nourished by Word and sacrament. So he calls to us today, *"Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep."*

Young people, take a lesson from your Savior. Be as concerned about the flock of Christ (and those who have yet to join it) as he is. Consider devoting your life to the full-time preaching or teaching ministry in Christ's kingdom. Parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, hold before the youth of our church the glorious privilege and opportunity which the Savior still holds out to them today. The work is still waiting. The Savior is still calling. Please answer as Peter did. Amen.

Jesus Still Calls to Us: Feed My Lambs, Feed My Sheep

Prayer

Gracious Savior and Good Shepherd of the Church, you came to seek and to save each and every one of this world's straying sheep, all we who once were lost in sin's maze of guilt and suffering and hopelessness and death. With your own perfect life and innocent death, you have rescued us from that fate, and have drawn us into your flock of believers who enjoy your constant presence and guidance and blessing. Keep us, Lord, from ever being selfish with your goodness. Make us ready to share what you have given to us with others in whatever way we have opportunity. In particular, we ask that your Shepherd's staff would guide the young and be able among us to turn to the study of your Word, that they may become your under-shepherds, serving you and your church in the public Gospel ministry. Let them and those who may influence them recognize that there is no more blessed or more important work in this world than that which is done by the teachers of your lambs and the pastors of your sheep, for they guide your flock toward the eternal pastures of heaven. Bless all your servants and the Church in which they serve. In your own precious name we ask it. Amen.