

There is something wonderful and awesome, and, if we are honest, scary about “call stories.” Such “calls” are scattered throughout the whole Bible — from Adam and Eve to John of Patmos. Our New Testament reading from *Luke* is, perhaps, not technically a telling of God’s call to service, but it fits pretty close. Jesus tells his hometown congregation, in effect, that God has called him to preach to the whole world.

And, our Old Testament reading this morning is a classic example of the wonder and awe of being called by God. It’s been used for ordinations and installations of many a pastor and elder. It has poetry and majesty, describing God’s touch on someone to bring God’s message to the people. Like I said, it’s a classic.

But, there’s more going on than just a “call story.” Here in *Jeremiah*, we see and hear something that is equally wonderful, awesome, and a little bit scary — the latter if one is overly worried about personal privacy. And, that is how well God knows each of us as well as knowing what we are to do with our lives.

I’m reading a book by James Rebanks. He is a sheep farmer in the Lake District of England. Listen to his opening paragraph:

I realized we were different, really different, on a rainy morning in 1987. I was in an assembly at the 1960s shoddy built concrete comprehensive school in our local town. I was thirteen or so years old. Sitting

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surrounded by a mass of other academic non-achievers listening to an old battle-weary teacher lecturing us how we should aim to be more than just farmworkers, joiners, brickies, electricians, and hairdressers. We were basically sorted aged twelve between those deemed intelligent (who were sent to a “grammar school”) and those of us that weren’t (who stayed at the “comprehensive”). Her words flowed past us without registering, a sermon she’d delivered many times before. It was a waste

of time and she knew it. We were firmly set, like our fathers and grandfathers, mothers and grandmothers before us, on being what we were, and had always been. Plenty of us were bright enough, but we had no intention of displaying it in school. It would have been dangerous.

I was drawn to Rebanks' description of being sorted in school around the age of thirteen, in part, because, while we don't know Jeremiah's age, he protests to God that he can't go be God's prophet, as he is yet a "boy." He presumes that he is too young, that a youth would not be taken seriously. Still, God's opening words to him are that God knew Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb --- before Jeremiah was even born, God knew who and what he was to be and do. And, I can't help but think that God can and, at times, does say such about every one of us. God knows who we are, what we are capable of, what God wants and hopes we will be and do.

James Rebanks thought he knew who he was and what he was to do

— to be a traditional sheep farmer on the dales and fells of the north of England like his father and grandfather. But, that wasn't all Mr. Rebanks was "destined" to do. With the support of the woman who became his wife, and others of his family, he qualifies and goes to Oxford University to get a degree in English, and takes a job in London working for a magazine as an assistant editor. You might think, "Well, that's great! "The man moved up in the world. "An education was the ticket to advancement." But, like me, you'd be wrong.

Remember Mr. Rebanks' opening words — he knew in his heart of hearts that he was, and would always be, a sheep farmer. Degree in hand, he returns to his family's farm, in the words spoken to his father then, to raise the best Hardwicks, an old breed of sheep well suited to the land where they farmed.

I tell snippets of Rebanks' life to show us how knowing who God calls us to be is important to knowing what God calls us to do. There is this concept that floats around that every church, every Christian should

concept that floats around that every church, every Christian should be exactly the same. Over the years, I've heard it said, that it doesn't matter what church one goes to, all churches are the same. I still recall an elder who I greatly respected stand up in a congregational meeting and say that all churches have the same "mission" — to make disciples. I agreed with him, but noted that not all churches (and their members) fulfill that "call" in the same way. What I was

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asking was, in what way was God calling that church to live out the Great Commission?

That's a real question for each of us. And, we can't fully answer that without knowing who we are. God "calls" each one of us, as well as, collectively, to work at making God's purpose of love, peace, grace, mercy, and hope visible. Each of us have different gifts to use in accomplishing such a task. Together, we use them to help each other and our community to see who we are. In short, who God is calling us to be and what God is calling us to do.

We may be teachers, geologists, dentists, builders, farmers, housewives, musicians, artists, lawyers, healthcare providers, even children of engineers. We may be retired or actively at work; yet, God knows who we are, and calls us and sends us into the world to help others know God as God calls them to be and do. Shall we listen and learn?

Let us pray: Awesome, wonderful, fearsome, loving God, we are humbled that You know us so well; that You have known us from before our existence. We are thankful that in knowing us, You call us to be Your agents of service, of love, of grace and mercy to bring peace and hope to a world that looks for every glimmer of Your good gifts and means of Your salvation. Continue to reach our hearts and minds to trigger our response by turning toward Your light that is made visible in, through, and as Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, our

Lord and Savior; in whose name we pray. Amen.