

Dads and Grads day - 6-9-19

Jeremiah 1

Rev. Alida Ward

Last Sunday, it was me and one of our new Deacons up here leading worship. And right before worship, that Deacon was pacing around nervously, re-reading her notes, and I was pacing around, re-reading my notes, and she said "I am so nervous," and I said "I'm so nervous," and she said "that's crazy, how can you be nervous, you do this every Sunday?"

But I was. I am. David and I are always kind of nervous when we're up here.

There's a lot of you out there.

It's scary.

[Chris, admit it, you were a little nervous when you woke up this morning, right?]

Although, I gotta tell you, I've spoken in several settings in the last couple weeks where I was so nervous

that standing here in the pulpit feels comforting in comparison.

Two weeks ago,

I was asked to speak at a special service honoring the retirement of my friend Rabbi Jim Prosnit, and I didn't realize until I got to the synagogue that pretty much every clergyperson and politician in a ten mile radius was going to be there. I was seated next to the president of Fairfield University, who, by the way, I didn't recognize and I asked him what his job was at the university, so that was embarrassing.

He also was speaking at the event,

and I immediately noticed that he had a lot more pages of notes than I did, so now I was even more freaked out about not having a long enough speech.

Super scary.

And then this past week I spoke at a town meeting,

and the Council of Churches in Bridgeport asked me to speak,

and I had to go to a hearing with the Historic District Committee to talk about our garage --

and I discovered in all these events

just how amazing the human body is
that it can turn your tongue into sandpaper,
and your knees into jello,
and make you sound like you're on helium, all at the same time.
My last few words at the Historic District hearing were literally squeaks.
"Thank you very much!!"

All of which means that I have tremendous sympathy for what a teenager named Jeremiah
said to God
when God told him that he was being called into a life of public speaking.
The story that Chris just read says that one day Jeremiah heard God saying to him, *Hey,*
"Jeremiah, remember me?
I'm the God who's loved you since before you were born.
And I have chosen YOU to go out and preach to everyone about me."

And Jeremiah's palms start to sweat and his knees wobble and he says
"Absolutely no way.
That is a terrifying thought."
And God says, *"Don't panic."*
And Jeremiah says, *"Oh, I'm panicking all right, God.*
There is no way I'm getting up and talking in front of people.
And by the way, have you noticed that I'm actually just a kid?"
And God says: *"Jeremiah, calm down.*
*I will tell you what to say. I will **put my words in your mouth.**"*

And Jeremiah takes a deep breath and says *okay.*
'Cause really, it's hard to say no to God.
Jeremiah says okay, and he does it.
He goes out and he starts talking to people about God.
He talks about God's love and power,
about how God wants people to live, how to treat one another.
Jeremiah lets God put words in his mouth,
so that the words he speaks to other people
are the words God wants him to speak.

And through his words others get a glimpse of the God in whose hands we are held.

So on this day when we honor our high school graduates,
what I'm here to tell them to do is actually what I want *all* of you to do.
I want you all to be like Jeremiah.

I don't literally mean get on out and start doing more public speaking --
because -- it's nerve-wracking.

I mean letting God put words in your mouth.

I mean letting the words that come out of your mouth be God's words.

We live in a time when a lot of the words coming out of people's mouths
are not the words God wants us to be using.

They are not words that God put in anyone's mouth.

I'm not talking about bad language, although there's plenty of examples.

I'm just talking about people talking down other people,
people saying things that do not contribute to civility.

There's a whole lot of that.

I want our high school grads,

and all of us, to go out and be the ones who let God choose our words for us.

And if God chooses your words for you,

then your words will be these:

They will be words of compassion.

They will be words of understanding, words of kindness.

They will be words of fairness, of justice.

The world could use a lot more of those words.

The world could use a lot more people letting God choose their words for them.

Now today is not just Graduates' day, of course, it's Father's day.

And earlier you heard some of our kids talk about what they've learned from their dads.

What I've learned from **my dad** --

in addition to how to fix a toilet, and replace a light switch --
what I've learned is the importance of letting God choose your words for you.

My dad speaks with kindness to others;
his words are chosen with care to lift up people up, not bring them down,
which is to say that he works hard to let God choose the words for him.
My father-in-law Gard Rowe, whom we remember on this first Father's Day without him, well,
he was the same way --
working hard to let God choose the words for him.

So let God be your speechwriter.
Let the words that you speak be words that the world needs to hear.
It doesn't have to be from a pulpit,
probably won't be from a pulpit.
But whenever you talk and when you text and when you email
and when you -- *old school* - pick up the phone,
let what you say be compassionate,
let it be wise, be fair, and be kind.

Let God put the words in your mouth.
Amen.